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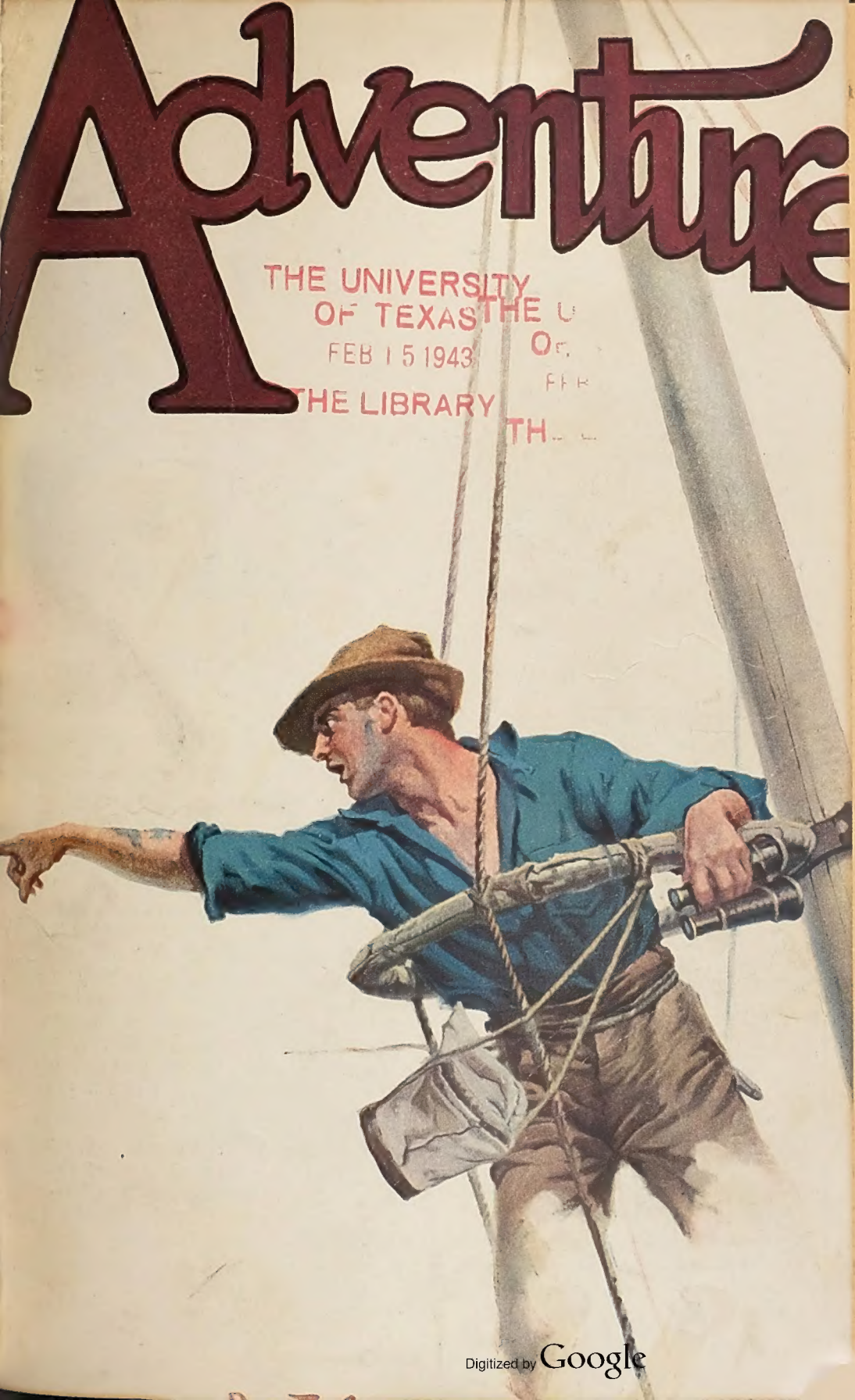

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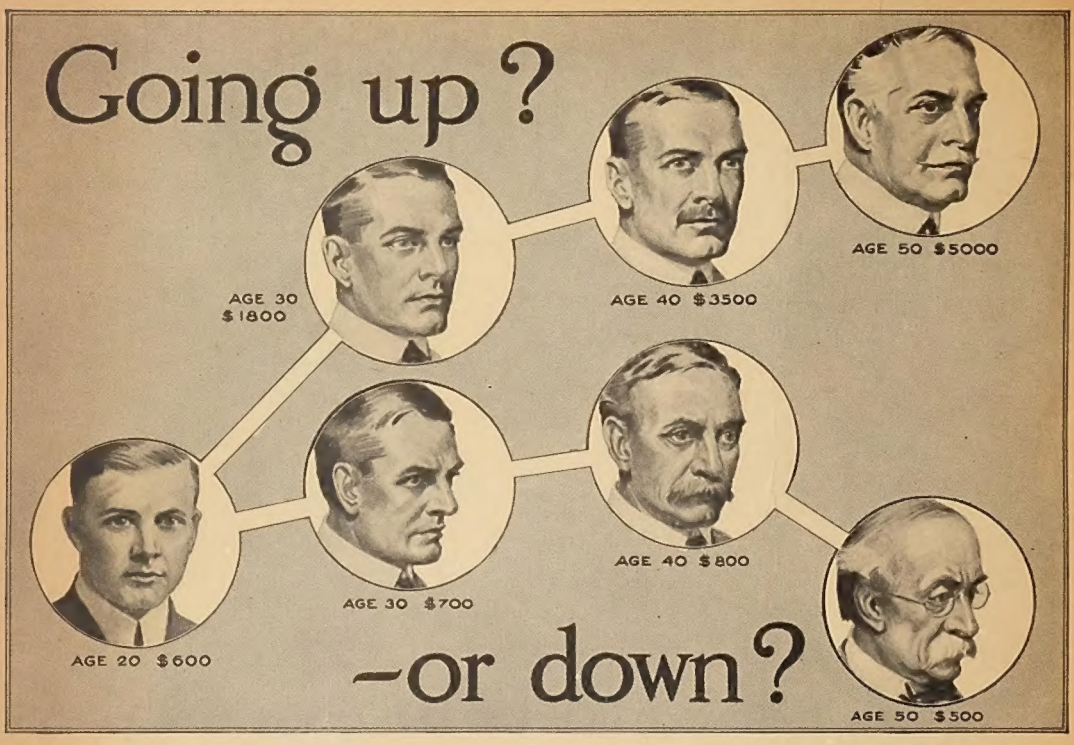

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for Apr. 1, 1917. State of New York. County of New York. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the *Adventure*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York. Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York. Managing Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York. 2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of the total amount of stock.) *Owner:* THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, N. Y. *Stockholders:* THE FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J. THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, 223 Spring Street, New York, N. Y. EMILY JOSEPHINE DONNER, P. O. Box 3036, New York City, N. Y. MRS. THERESA R. CARROLL, 777 Madison Avenue, New York City, N. Y. W. H. GELSHENEN, 100 William Street, New York City, N. Y. CLARA E. KEHOE, 2524 Creston Avenue, New York City, N. Y. H. F. MORSE, 3 West 46th Street, New York City, N. Y. LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 156 Ridge Street, Glens Falls, N. Y. MRS. ARETHUSA POND, 955 West End Avenue, New York City, N. Y. ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. AUGUSTUS VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. R. A. VAN WYCK, 149 Broadway, New York City, N. Y. H. N. WHITNEY & SONS, 17 Broad Street, New York City, N. Y. G. W. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. BEN F. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. MARIE A. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City, N. Y. 3. *That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.)* THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, Spring and Macdougal Streets, N. Y. JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE, 125 West 39th Street, N. Y. MRS. J. C. HARDY, Tecumseh, Mich. JOHN ADAMS THAYER, Westport, Conn. MARTHA LEWIS, Westerville, Ohio. GERTRUDE C. WILDER, Butterick Building, N. Y. R. W. POOR, 5th Avenue and 23rd Street, N. Y. GEORGE W. WILDER, Butterick Building, N. Y. ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, Montclair, N. J. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner: and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. J. F. BIRMINGHAM, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of March, 1917. CECIL L. WAHL, Notary Public, Kings County. Certificate filed New York County. (*My commission expires March* 30, 1918.)

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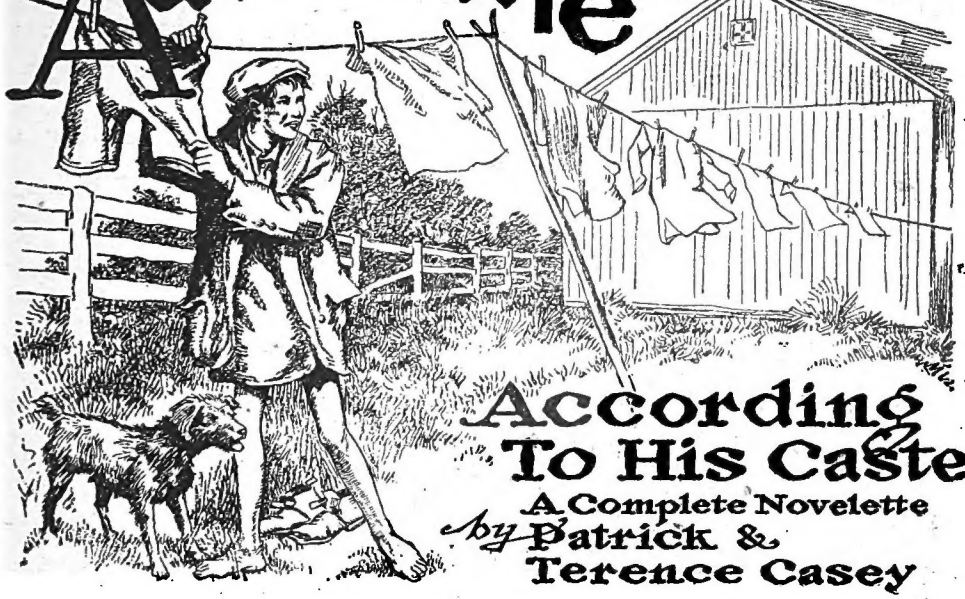

According To His Caste

A Complete Novelette

by Patrick & Terence Casey

Authors of "The Story of William Hyde," "The Chase of the Four Fools," etc.

CHAPTER I

NO TROUSERS TO HIS BACK

ONE morning in Indian Summer, a morning of pelting sunlight and of hot little gusts that drove brown and crimson leaves whirling down the road and that drove down the road, also, a golden chaff of dust, the Frisco Kid shuffled along, his hands slouched in his pockets, the yellow dog, Gay-Cat, running at his side. And the Kid's thoughts were all wistful thoughts of winding rivers, of cool pools, and of swimming.

The Frisco Kid, small for his fifteen years, scrawny of neck, was a boy hobo, a road-kid. He had been railroading for two nights on the "rods" of freights. He had been hiking the whole long, hot Indian Summer dawning.

The countryside, brown and baked with Autumn, seemed a countryside that raised nothing but whirling leaves and dust. The dust was fine, powdery. It sifted through the ragged clothing of the boy. It lay upon his face like a brown flour. It choked his nostrils and sanded his throat. He longed for a "wash-up."

And then, beside the road he followed, he caught the flash of water between willow-trees.

To that side of the road lay a broad field, yellow with mustard weeds; and, squatting in the field, among the weeds, was a gable-roofed dusty-red building which, from the runway of planks leading up to the wide door in front, had every appearance of a barn. Behind the barn, to one side of it, a line of washing was hung out to dry: a man's undershirt, limp and khaki-colored, three pairs of black socks, two white outer shirts, and a pair of short, faded-green breeches which may have been used as swimming—or running—trunks.

Beyond the line of washing drooped the row of willows from between which the water glinted as from a mirror that catches the sun.

"There's swimmin' over there, Gay-Cat!" said the Frisco Kid, his deep-sunk eyes eager. "Swimmin', old hobo, and a chanst to wash our clo'es. But farmers is grouchy sometimes," he admonished, "awful grouchy to hoboes. And the river is on his land," with some faint knowledge of riparian rights. "I wonder, now, is that farmer near his old barn?"

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He looked closely at the dusty-red barn. The barn lacked windows in front; it seemed to sleep in the middle of the field. The line of washing was the only flaunt of life. As the Kid looked, it swayed and flapped in the little gusts of wind.

The Gay-Cat had caught the flash of water. His yellow head came up. He did not hesitate there beside the ramshackle fence. He wriggled through and trotted out, smart and boldly, into the tall mustard weeds. A few yards and he looked back, his black-tipped nose uptilted in surprise over the Kid not following him, and his stump of a tail wagging his fierce impatience.

The Frisco Kid took heart. Another look at the sleeping barn, the flapping line of washing, the impatient yellow cur, and he was out in the field, running through the wild mustard, racing along, his little body bent low, his course set directly for the glint of water.

They came, panting, into the cool shade of the belt of willows that followed the near bank of the stream. Here the Kid stood erect, done with his fear of the farm people. They could not see him, now, from the barn.

The stream was but a little stream. It was low and shrunk with the drought of Autumn, and either side of its bed was hot sandy beach. There were places where the water rippled over pebbly bars as over glistening white washboards; but there were places, too, that were deep—slow green pools, overhung with willows and cottonwoods, and cool with shadow.

The Frisco Kid did not shout, "Beat yer in, Gay-Cat!" and, running down the bank, shedding his clothing piece by piece as he ran, plunge right in. That would be a boy's way. That would be the way of a boy who had been ardently wishing for a green-shadowed river in which to swim—the way of a glad, glad boy who had chanced at last upon his wish. And the Kid was more than a boy, more even than a road-kid. He was a full-fledged "blown-in-the-glass stiff."

Now, the great army of hoboes that railroad and foot it about this country, form a complete order of society, a markedly defined caste. It is a low and pariah caste, forsooth; yet it is nevertheless a large caste of beggars, vagabonds and outcasts. And like every other caste, this large caste allows of being divided into several smaller, distinct and inner castes, for hoboes believe in the complete equality of men in all things no more than does any one else.

Wherefore, there is within the great hobo caste, a meager class of Brahmins, an aristocracy which dominates the riffraff and arrogates to itself a feeling of superiority over the rank and file. The men of this high inner caste call themselves "blown-in-the-glass stiffs."

They are the real McCoy. They are those who are "comets," "tramps royal," "good moochers." A comet is a hobo who can railroad with ease and nonchalance over the whole country in a few weeks. He never pays a fare. He rides only the fastest trains. A tramp royal is one who hoboes across continents rather than countries, a paradoxical globe-trotter who neither pays toll nor works, yet never misses a meal or a decent bed. And a good moocher is he who can "panhandle" the "main stem" of a town or "buzz" a mansion with equal facility, and withal beg so winningly as to amass a small fortune in a surprisingly short while.

These men are, therefore, the most efficient men in the hobo caste. They consider themselves the true hoboes. They look with contempt upon less efficient hoboes. They abhor "bindle-stiffs" who never ride trains. They abominate "tomato-can bums" who never wash. They are proud, consciously proud of their position in the hobo caste; that makes them content to be hoboes; and they are fiercely jealous of their position. They shun contemptuously lower orders of tramps as a Brahmin shuns a Sudra. They associate with the blown-in-the-glass stiffs.

The efficient men in every caste, up and down the whole tremendous edifice of civilization, keep themselves most clean. That is part and parcel of, and a bit of the reason for, their efficiency. It is the major reason for the blown-in-the-glass stiff's efficiency. What with railroading on rods and trucks and tops, it is impossible to keep clean for even a short length of time. Yet it is necessary that they keep clean, that they have a "front," as their argot has it.

With their bodies scrupulously washed, their hair cropped, their faces shaved, their clothing so well-brushed and free from travel-grime as to look almost respectable, they can "brace" the finest mansion or "drill down" the "main drag" of the town without chancing being pulled as a vag.

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The Frisco Kid was something of the comet, a bit of the tramp royal, and a deal of the good moocher. He was, in a word, a blown-in-the-glass stiff. He was a boy, too, and like a boy, he desired to rush pell-mell down to the stream, undressing as he ran, and plunge straightway into the water and splash and play about.

But pride of caste held a check-rein on his impulses. He was a blown-in-the-glass stiff, one of an efficient few in a shiftless and lackadaisical caste. And his front, his clothing, was in a horrible condition. It was not fit for any blown-in-the-glass stiff. It unfitted him for the business of being a blown-in-the-glass stiff. Wherefore, ere ever he could think of swimming, as a true blown-in-the-glass stiff, he must wash his clothes.

THE Frisco Kid went to the water's edge and slowly, thoughtfully, methodically, he undressed. The Gay-Cat was already frolicking in the stream, barking to him to come on. The Kid paid him no heed. With slowness, with thought and with method, he dipped his damp and dusty blue shirt into the water, wrung it out, and dipped and wrung it out again.

The Frisco Kid did not wear much clothing in the hot months: a blue shirt, a pair of blue jeans, a ragged over-large coat, a cap, and track-worn shoes.

The coat he did not attempt to wash. He removed the precious matches he always carried for his cigarets. He beat out a great cloud of dust by swinging the coat against a boulder left high and dry on the beach. Then he draped the coat over the boulder beside the matches and his misshapen shoes.

But the blue jeans were stiff with oil and dust. They needed a thorough washing. The oily jeans he dipped in the water, wrung out, pounded, dipped, wrung out, and pounded again and yet again. Then, his arms tired and his washing accomplished, he left the shirt and blue jeans to soak out in a shallow pool, where they were anchored to the bottom by a rock as large as his two fists.

He now joined the dripping, frolicking Gay-Cat in a swim. The swim would constitute a wash-up, cleansing away all the thousand fine grains of dust which fretted his skin.

The Frisco Kid was brown, brown almost to the color of chocolate, with much swimming in the sun and in lazy, winding, green-bordered tiny streams such as this. His brown slim young body rose upon a convenient rock above a pool just made for diving, flashed down, and came up again. The hair dripping into his eyes, his mouth spouting water and great shouts of happiness, he chased the barking blissful Gay-Cat, splashed him; and was chased in turn by the happy-go-lucky mongrel.

It was a golden hour, an hour of care-free hearts, an hour of morning sun and sweet clean water, an hour of madcap pranks, laughter, shouts, frenzied barking, of an altogether abandoned joy in nakedness and freedom—a happy pagan hour in a pagan day.

But soon the shadows huddled close about the boles of the willows and cottonwoods, and the little stream became like a mold of silver under the stark sun, straight overhead. It was noon.

The Kid left off shouting and racing about. He thought of lifting his clothes from their anchorage in the shallow pool and spreading them out upon the sandy beach to dry. He thought of spreading himself out upon the sandy beach to bake. It was very warm now, and, in a little, his clothes would be fit to wear and then, in the cool of the afternoon, he could "batter" the back doors for lunch. He felt hungry.

He waded over to the side of the stream where was the shallow pool. The blue shirt was dragging at the anchor rock, the current pulling at it as a wind pulls at a flag. The Kid lifted the shirt. His brown face, shiny from the swim, was suddenly pale. The blue jeans had been torn away from under the rock by the steady pull of the current. They had floated down-stream. They were gone.

The Gay-Cat was playing with the pasty body of a dead bullfrog on the opposite bank. The Kid called to him:

"Come here, Gay-Cat. I've—I've lost my pants. They's floated away. We gotta hunt 'em up quick, old-timer."

He wrung out the shirt and spread it upon the beach to dry, the while his eyes darted about in search of the only trousers to his back. He was very methodical, very quiet, like one a little stunned.

He ran along the bank, looking for a blue soggy mass that should be floating down with the current. He stood for moments

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beside a pebbly bar over which the water trickled so thinly that surely the jeans must be caught and held fast there. But no jeans floated with the current, no blue jeans lay in the slack water or along the sandy banks.

Thus, he had run a little distance downstream, around several bends, when there uprose before him, overhanging the stream, the back porch of a white two-storied house. Full in the sun on the back porch, his chair tilted on two legs against the wall, a man slept, a ratty little man, hardly bigger than the Kid, his bare head close-clipped and shaped like an upended egg.

The Frisco Kid stopped shortly. He motioned the Gay-Cat to draw near. Then dog and naked boy watched that man sleep on the porch.

Finally the dog looked up at the boy, an intelligible question in his animal eyes.

"No, Gay-Cat," counseled the Kid, his face turning ruddy-brown with a sudden sense of his nakedness. "We can't go no farther, you and me. That's the farmer what owns that barn and this river. This is his old farmhouse. And he looks kinder horstile, don't yer think, old hobo? We'd better go back."

The Kid made back, examining closely the bars, raking the bottoms of pools with a stick, poking under bushes and about the water-whelmed roots of willows and cottonwoods, searching everywhere it was possible for the jeans to lie concealed. He grew ever more hurried and anxious. He rushed from one side of the stream to the other at the merest whim; rushed back again; and all for nothing.

His breath came short after all his anxious dashes, and he felt weak in the knees. He was sick with disappointment and despair. He would have cried only—only the Gay-Cat would have seen.

At last, dull with despair, he went to the bank and struggled into his shirt, though it was still wet. He replaced the precious matches, and put on cap and coat, for somehow he felt a sensation of cold and loneliness. And then, his shoes in his hand, he turned from the stream and, without another look, in his bare feet climbed the bank.

The Gay-Cat followed at his heels, head down, tail drooped, a silent dog with all light-heartedness gone out of him. The Gay-Cat had accompanied the Kid on all the futile hunts for the missing blue jeans. There had been said no word, but the Gay-Cat knew the Kid was heartsick and miserable, and that misery of the Kid had communicated itself to the dog.

The Frisco Kid halted among the willows at the top of the bank. Before him lay the field of mustard weeds, and beyond that the wandering road, and still beyond that the world, big and empty, inhospitable and pitiless.

The Kid had no home to go to, no lunch awaiting him in a kindly mother's kitchen. Yet that is the normal condition of all hoboes. And the Kid was a hobo. That was his normal condition. Now, however, something else had been added to the particular sum of his hardships, something wrong, abnormal and staggering. He had no trousers to his back.

The Frisco Kid was in a pitiable fix. With the jeans covering his nakedness, he might have gone forth at once and begged a hand-out at a farmhouse door. But he was in his shirt-tails and coat-tails. All on a sudden he had become unfitted for the business of being a hobo, of being a blown-in-the-glass stiff. What could he do, a half-grown boy, a hobo and a vagabond, naked in the stark day, with an empty road of long silent miles ahead and the big soundless world to either hand, unfriendly and pitiless?

CHAPTER II

A KNIGHT OF THE SQUARE CIRCLE

THE Frisco Kid stood among the willows, hesitant, fearful of venturing forth. All at once, he turned as if to run back down the bank. A great clatter from the barn had frightened him. But it was only the line of washing, swaying and flapping in a sudden hot gust.

The Frisco Kid looked at that line of washing, then at the barn, a dusty-red bulk. As in front, so in back, there were no windows. The barn slept quietly among the mustard weeds.

"Keep quiet, Gay-Cat," breathed the Kid, "keep awful quiet, 'cause we'se gonna mooch." And he stepped, on bare tiptoes, out into the mustard weeds.

The dog followed with a certain caution that seemed to have come abruptly at the Kid's words. It was almost as if he imitated the Kid, move for move. He followed behind, and lifted each leg carefully,

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and put each leg down with the same silence and precision. Often he paused, even as the Kid paused, one foreleg raised and bent above the paw, poised for the next forward step, while, with sharp nose, he sniffed the air and looked, now to the right, now to the left. There was something about him that seemed almost wolfish then, as if the ferine strain sleeping within him had awakened and gripped him, and now dominated him utterly.

The Frisco Kid advanced between the wild mustard with body bent and head lowered, looking now to the right, now to the left. When but a few yards from the barn, he broke into a quick run. He ran along the line of washing, the shirts and yellow undergarment flapping in his face.

Standing on tiptoes beneath where the faded-green trunks hung, he reached up to the line, pulled out two clothes-pins, and then bundling the trunks into a tight round ball, scuttled forward and flattened himself against the rear wall of the barn. Now was he safe to get into the stolen trunks.

The Kid felt no compunction at stealing the trunks. He was a hobo. The ethics of the great hobo caste were his ethics. A hobo considers it no sin to commit a petty theft. And it was a petty theft to steal the trunks. For all that they were made of some good jersey, soft and agreeable to the touch, their faded color told a story of many washings. They were old. And the Kid needed them sadly. His, then, was a necessary theft and hence, according to hobo ethics, a permissible, even an advisable theft.

The dog humped himself on his haunches and watched the Frisco Kid as he slipped into the trunks. They fitted him after a fashion. They may have been the swimming-trunks of the farmer's son. An elastic cord ran round the top of them and, while the Kid's lean stomach did not distend that cord, at least the cord circled his waist snugly enough to hold up the trunks.

The Kid's face glowed a happy red beneath its coat of tan, as he put on his track-worn shoes.

"I've got it, old hobo!" he nodded brightly to the dog. "Now we can go down the stream and that little hayseed on the porch can't say a word agin us. We'll bring back these trunks, mebbe, after we find my pants."

The Kid came back to the stream. The faded-green trunks were almost hidden by the ends of his man-size coat, and his brown legs beneath looked very stark and spindly. His feet slapped in their sockless shoes. Yet the Kid no longer felt naked. He started down the bank of the stream at a fast clip, the dog following close behind, his sharp-nosed yellow head raised pertly in a renewal of interest.

But no little ratty man with close-clipped egg-shaped head now slept upon the back porch of the two-storied white house. The porch lay empty and deserted in the sunshine.

With an accession of boldness, the Frisco Kid and the dog strode along the bank toward the porch and under it where it overhung the stream. And there, in the shadows, wrapped about one of the stilts which upheld the porch over the stream, the Kid came, quite unexpectedly, upon his blue jeans.

Making up the bank and further under the concealment of the porch, the Kid doffed the faded-green trunks and cast them upon the sand at his feet. He was in haste to get back into his jeans. But the jeans were very wet. He wrung them out and beat them against the foundation timbers of the porch.

"They's gotta do, Gay-Cat," he said to the dog. "We hasn't no time to lose. Don't yer hear them sounds of eatin' upstairs?"

From overhead came the clatter of knives and forks against plates and of spoons in cups.

"That little hayseed didn't look a bit Jake, old-timer; he sure looked horstile. But let's get up there and mebbe we can get a set-down. I'se awful hungry, old hobo. I guess it's that swim and all the runnin' about, that's done it. We'll try to mooch a poke-out, anyways. Say, Gray-Cat, where is yer?"

The Kid looked about for the dog. The dog had disappeared into the dark under the house. Also had disappeared—though the Kid did not notice this—the faded-green trunks at his feet. But now, as the Kid looked round, the dog scurried out to him, his stump of a tail wagging energetically as if in happiness and triumph over some achievement done.

The Kid and the dog stepped out from under the porch. Come of the hunger pangs that were gnawing his stomach, the

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Kid had wholly forgotten now about the faded-green trunks, which he had meant truly to return to the wash-line. Quickly, by means of one of the stilts, he clambered up into the porch. He was going to batter the back door.

The dog sat up on his yellow haunches upon the sand below and lifted his nose and animal eyes in a pitiable expression of helplessness. He could not climb up into the porch. It seemed as if, in a moment, he would yowl.

"Aw, come on," urged the Kid. "And don't yer make no noise, old Gay-Cat. Do yer wanta queer me? Jes' you make around this house, old-timer, and see if yer can't come up the front way."

The dog got upon all-fours and strode, with many a backward glance, toward the front of the house.

The Kid went around the sun-bathed porch. Where the sounds of dining emanated through a screen door, he paused to knock. He could not see through the close screening of the door, but he knew, from the sounds of dining, that some one was within in the shade of the room. And hurriedly, lying fluently like a true blown-in-the-glass stiff, he said:

"Aw, yer couldn't stack us up to some eats, now, could yer, boss? Me and my dog, we's come a awful long ways, this mornin'. We're makin' down to Midvale Junction to my brother there. Mebbe yer knows him—a one-armed guy what lowers the gates acrost the road. My mother's sick in a hospital up Frisco way, and I'm a-goin' down to live with my brother. We's come a awful long ways, this mornin', the dog and me. Yer couldn't stack us up to a lump of somethin', could yer?"

A heavy voice stopped the Kid.

"Cut it, bo, an' beat it quick. We don't fall fer that line of yer's one bit. What'd yuh do—crisscross with that bum that was here last night, an' come back to work us agin? Beat it now, or we'll git a Dick after yuh. G'wan!"

"Aw, boss; aw, say now, boss," pleaded the Kid incoherently, his sunburnt nose pressed so hard against the wire screen that it was almost white. "Couldn't yer give us jes' a little scoffs—a poke-out, a ball-lump, jes' a sand'ich even, jes' for the dog and me?"

He waited. There was a whispered consultation going on within. And he could make out, now, three men seated about a linen-covered table that steamed with hot food. They did not have the appearance of farmers or farm laborers. Two of them wore sweaters that looked very out of place in the warm Indian Summer noon. The other ate with his coat on. He was a stout, florid-complexioned man, with a white vest and a red necktie from which a diamond, big as a pea, sparkled. The Kid knew him, right off, for the "main gee" of the three.

"Oh, don't tell me what the Gouger'd do," this fellow was saying to the other two, with a show of anger. "Gouger Meehan's too superstitious. I'm afraid he's losin' his nerve. An' I'm bossin' him anyways—I'm bossin' this whole shebang! I tell yuh, I won't have these boes buzzin' us fer meals no more!"

He turned toward the screen door and the Frisco Kid beyond it. A sneer bent his large mouth.

"Yuh got yer orders, bo," he said. "Beat it!"

The Frisco Kid turned away. As he did, he almost stumbled over the dog who had come around the porch from the front of the house and was then hugging his knees.

"'Tain't no use, old hobo," he said to the dog, a melancholy wistfulness in his voice. "We don't eat here, we don't even get a hand-out. This is sure a horstile place."

The Frisco Kid looked up quickly. A man was watching him.

The man had just come around the porch from the front of the house. He was a little man, hardly taller than the boy, about five-feet-four, with close-clipped egg-shaped head, a battered face blue-black from much shaving, and uncommonly broad shoulders. He was the little ratty man the Kid had seen asleep on the porch when he had been searching for his jeans. He smiled now with open friendliness at the boy, his face screwing up into a network of wrinkles.

"What's thet yuh say about this place bein' horstile?" he asked.

"Aw, I didn't mean no harm, boss," said the Kid, quite taken aback, scraping the flooring with one sockless shoe. "I only wanted some eats." His face glowed. "Aw, yer couldn't stack us up to some chow, now, could yer, old-timer?"

"Me?" said the little man, and he laughed. "Why don't yuh ast me somethin' hard? I guess I sure kin! Say, kid, yuh never

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heard of Gouger Meehan turnin' down a stiff, did yuh? Don't know when I may have ter hit the rods an' back doors myself. Come on; I'll fix yuh up."

He made to go by the Kid toward the screen door. But the look in the Kid's deep-sunken eyes stopped him. It was a look of stupefaction, as if the Kid were dazed by some great intelligence.

"What's eatin' yuh, bo?" he asked with his frank, wrinkled smile.

The Kid stuttered quite helplessly.

"Aw, bo; aw, say now, bo! Ye ain't stringin' me none, now, is yer? Yer really mean yer is Gouger Meehan, the fighter?"

The little man laughed outright and slapped his knee with one knotted hand.

"Thet's me, pal—Gouger Meehan, the best 133-pound boy on the coast. Yuh ain't leary, are yuh? I won't eat yuh. But I will give yuh somethin' ter eat."

He turned toward the screen door.

"No, yuh don't, Gouger!" broke in a new and heavy voice.

The screen door was open and the stout, red-faced man in the white vest, who ate with his coat on, was filling the oblong of it, the pea-sized diamond in his red necktie flashing violently in the sunlight.

His full lips slapped together.

"Yuh don't set up no more of these boes, Gouger! Oh, I know all about yuh bein' afraid to turn down a bo fer fear it'll bring yuh bad luck; but I'm gittin' sick an' tired of yer superstitions. I'll have no more stiffs eatin' here."

"Shucks, yuh wouldn't turn this kid away, would yuh, Briggs? Looket his neck! Why, he looks like he hasn't et in a week."

The large mouth of the stout red-faced man curved again in a sneer.

"Aw, yuh don't come over me any with that soft stuff, Meehan. I know what yer afraid of. An' I'm gittin' sick an' tired of yer good-luck bosh. Yer losin' yer nerve, Gouger. Yuh wouldn't train in any place but this joint, with that barn of a gym 'most a city block away. 'Cause why? 'Cause yuh happened to win a couple of fights in this neck o' the woods when yuh trained here afore. An' now yuh wanta set up every bo fer a square at the same table with me. 'Cause why again? Jes' 'cause yuh think it'll bring yuh luck. I'll stand it no more!"

The Frisco Kid looked from the prize-fighter to the stout red-faced man in a great wonder. It was as if he could not understand the domineering tones of the stout man when speaking to the prize-fighter, the almost pleading tones of that celebrity of the square circle.

"Gee," he whispered in a hot breath of amazement, "I'd eat him up if I was the Gouger! The Gouger can lick any one, one hand!"

As if actuated, telepathically, by the Kid's idea of him, the Gouger's face had set, of a sudden, into firm wrinkles of determination. His voice dropped its pleading tones and he said quietly, without any bluster:

"Thet's enough, Briggs. Yuh listen ter me. Yer my manager, but yer gonna quit me ef I lose this fight. Aw, I know. Every one'll put the skids under me ef I go down fur the count. I'll be jes' a punk pug, down an' out. But it won't be the first time. Thet's why I wanta feed this kid. I know what it is. An' I'm gonna feed him, right now. Yuh kin chase yerself off, ef yuh don't like it. Now git outa my way."

The manager changed face with a suddenness that seemed hypocritical. He laughed perfunctorily.

"Oh, don't get sore, Gouger. Have it yer own way—have everything yer own way. But I wanta tell yuh one thing. Yuh ain't goin' to lose this fight; but win or lose, I won't throw the skids under yuh. Yuh know me, Gouger. I'll stand by yuh."

"That's us," spoke up the two sweater-garbed men at his back. "We'll stick by yer, Gouger."

"We'll see," said the prize-fighter almost morosely.

He turned to the Kid.

"Come on, old-timer," he said, his battered face once again wrinkling into a contagious smile. "An' bring the hound-dawg along, too."

CHAPTER III

THE GOUGER OBEYS A "HUNCH"

THE Frisco Kid paused between two mouthfuls as with a sudden fear.

"He won't quit yer, will he?" he asked. "That big feller, I mean. He's your manager, huh? He won't leave yer 'cause of me, now?"

The prize-fighter laughed.

"Don't yuh worry none, son," he said.

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"He'll throw the skids under me soon 'nuff. Yuh jes' go ahead an' eat."

He sat back and looked up at the ceiling.

"I've got a hunch—got it the moment I lamped yuh, kid. Yuh stick around here awhile. Terday is my last day of trainin'. Termorrer I dry out ter make the weight. Gotta fight at two-thirty termorrer. Yuh stick around till after the fight."

The Kid looked at the prize-fighter, his gipsy-blue eyes shining with thankfulness and awe.

"Gee," he said, "I'll be awful glad to stick around, Gouger. And Gay-Cat—can Gay-Cat stick around, too?"

The Gouger looked blank for the moment.

"I mean him, my old pup," said the Kid, and he motioned to the dog, erect on his haunches on the chair alongside of him, his forepaws upon the table and his jaws snapping into a juicy cut of steak that was smeared with fried onions.

The Gouger smiled, his battle-hacked face a network of wrinkles, and then nodded quickly.

"Cert," he said. "I made a dead fall ter thet yeller hound-dawg the moment I lamped him. I've got a hunch, kid, I tell yuh; an' my hunches are usually pretty good. Yuh stick around awhile, you an' the hound-dawg, an' after you've finished chowin', it'll be about time ter go up ter the gym an' do a spell of indoor work. Yuh come along an' tote the dawg. An' don't yuh take no orders from nobody but me."

The Kid could not speak. Like all hoboes, he always had thought prize-fighters great men. Now, having met one of their number in Gouger Meehan, and having plumbed to a warm spot in the Gouger's heart, he was sure that prize-fighters were great men. He could only look his thankfulness and awe.

After a little, he fell again to eating. He finished the bounteous helping of buttered potatoes, juicy steak and fried, pungent onions.

The pugilist ceased drumming with his knotty fingers on the edge of the table to order, from the kitchen, a second helping for the Kid and for his dog. As the Kid attacked the second helping with undiminished gusto, the ring-man no longer drummed on the table. He watched the Kid, his gray eyes thoughtful, almost somber, beneath their projecting frontal bone.

After a little more, the Frisco Kid looked up, and his eyes, the blue of the gipsying Celt, were spread wide in their deep-sunk pits.

"Gee!" he breathed as if to himself, looking full at the Gouger. "It must be swell to be a fighter like him and lick everybody, one hand!"

The pugilist started, as if rudely awakened from deep thought. He tilted his head to one side.

"What's thet yer spieling, pal?" he asked. "Yuh know," he added, a little shamefacedly, "I can't hear so well. Sometimes, when the wind's away from me, I can't hear the tap of the gong at the end of a round. It's these things—cauliflower ears." He touched his ears.

The Frisco Kid looked at his ears, then almost unconsciously felt of his own. He could feel the curves and indentations in his ears; but the prize-fighter's ears he could see, had no such curves and indentations. They were red and bloated from helix to lobe, and, where once had been the great cave of the ear, was now only a hole of pinhead size.

"I'm gittin' old," said the pugilist soberly, with a tinge of gloom. "Thet's why I clip my hair so clost—so the gray hairs won't show. Yes, I'm gittin' old," and he shook his oddly-shaped head. "I'm not the Gouger enny more. I don't bore in like I used ter. I guess I've taken too many beatin's about the head ter care much about doin' it now. Thet's why I can't hear—too many beatin's on the head."

He leaned toward the Kid.

"But this other guy, Slugger Sweigert, he's young. He's a back-blocker, a Cockney from Australia. An' he don't know nuthin' about the game; he's a tin-eared boob. But he's never bin beaten about the head like me—he's only had about ten fights—an' he's fresh an' young.

"Gee, thet's why I gotta train so hard," he said with a kind of sigh of regret. "I hate it—the road-work, an' sparrin', an' gittin' down ter weight. But I have ter go through with it ter stand a chance in this fight. Ef I lose this fight, I'll be a back-number, a has-been. There'll be no more long goes fur me, no more big money; only the four-round glove-fests with a bunch of hams. But yuh'll help me win this fight, huh, kid?" he ended almost pleadingly. "Yuh'll lemme try out my hunch, an' stick

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around awhile, you an' yer dawg, eh, kid?"

The Frisco Kid, feeling suddenly weighed down by this new if vague responsibility, could only nod in dumb assent. The dog beside him on a chair, sat up and licked his chops to signify that he had had a sufficiency. In significance of the same, the Kid shoved back his chair and asked for a smoke.

The Gouger shook his close-clipped, egg-shaped head.

"I'm in trainin'," he said meaningly. "I can't smoke while I'm on this gag. But I'll buy yuh a cigar round in front. Kin you smoke a cigar, kid?"

"Can I smoke a seegar? Aw, say now, Gouger!"

THE Kid and the dog followed the prize-fighter out of the dining-room and round the porch to the front of the roadhouse. The Gouger's manager and two sparring mates, known as Bud and Steve, were not in front. According to the tavern-keeper, they had gone on ahead to the gymnasium.

At the information, the prize-fighter pulled out a heavy gold watch from a little pocket in the front of his trousers.

"Whew!" he whistled, as he scanned the face of it. "One-forty-five. It's time we oughter be strollin' up the road ter the gym." He turned to the Kid. "Yuh passed it in comin' down, didn't yuh—a big red dusty-lookin' barn?"

The Kid nodded remotely, his mind and fingers busy over the business of removing the label from a stout black cigar. Then, out upon the road and on toward the gymnasium he followed the Gouger, exhaling great puffs of white smoke into the hazy Indian Summer air, the Gay-Cat trotting, round-bellied and contented, beside him.

The wide door of the red dusty barn was open and a number of men were standing about in the sunshine. They made room for the Gouger to enter, eying him with singular admiration and venturing a word of greeting, even though their acquaintance might be of the slightest. They were fight-fans. They filed somewhat sheepishly into the big, ill-ventilated gymnasium and took seats along the walls, sitting alert and stiffly postured.

The Gouger left the Kid sitting on a chair near the punching-bag frame, his legs dangling above the floor and the dog sitting up in his lap with ears cocked and black-spotted nose sniffing.

There was a smell of sweat in the air. The Gouger opened a trolley-weighted door in one wall and went into the little room beyond—the rub-down room.

After a short wait, he came out, girt in a gymnasium suit which was different from fighting-trunks in that it had an upper, like a swimming-suit, covering his chest. For a run of minutes, he caused the punching-bag to beat a tattoo against its frame.

The Kid and the dog watched him in an immeasurable admiration.

"Gee, Gay-Cat," the Kid breathed to the dog, "what an arm that Gouger has! Jes' see how he makes that bag dance. And he can keep it up! I wouldn't wanta be hit like that for anything—not us, huh, Gay-Cat?"

The yellow dog watched the thudding bag as if it were some disturbing fly, buzzing above his head.

The pugilist swung hard on the punching-bag and then turned away to lift the pulling-machines on the wall. That was to strengthen his back muscles. He skipped rope like a tomboy, to limber his legs and quicken his footwork. A fast game of handball, with the Gouger opposing his two sparring mates, sped through an interval of ten minutes.

Then, when the Gouger and the two sparring partners were freely oozing moisture, the gloves were donned for sparring. The crowd of fight-fans stood up, thereat, and formed about the Gouger and his particular opponent an eager hollow square.

The Frisco Kid stood up upon his chair in order to see over the heads of the men. The Gay-Cat, disturbed from his lap, bounded down upon the flooring and crept between the legs of the fight-fans. But the Kid called softly to him and when he at last drew near, lifted him up beside him upon the top of the punching-bag stand.

"Now yer can see, old hobo," the Kid whispered into one twitching ear. "You stay right there, and yer'll see the Gouger lick those two guys, one hand."

The men, in sparring, used gloves an ounce or two heavier than the regulation boxing-gloves. The extra weight of padding protected the sparring partners from receiving damage at the hands of the Gouger; the constant pistoning of those heavy gloves strengthened the Gouger's

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arms; and when the time came, the following day, to put on the fighting-gloves, the regulation five-ounce calfskins would feel very light to the Gouger after the daily weight of the large gymnasium gloves. For rounds, he would be able to lay about him with those light fighting-gloves, ere awakening the fatigue poisons in the muscles of his arms.

The Gouger took on one sparring partner, the red-headed freckled fellow called Bud. They fiddled about and, for two short rounds, tapped each other quickly but lightly. Then the Gouger boxed the second sparring mate for three rounds.

The Frisco Kid breathed a deep sigh of relief when the second set-to was over.

"Gee, I was kinder leary of that feller," he said as he lowered the dog to the floor, referring to the second sparring partner called Steve. "That feller looks sorter fierce, he's got so much black hair on him. But the Gouger fixed him all right. I'll bet Steve's glad it's all over!"

However, despite the Kid's anxiety and tension, the mains had proved very tame. The Gouger had not wanted to extend himself on the day preceding the fight, and both sparring mates had been fearful of inflicting any material damage. Were they to lay open his lip, or bruise him about the deep-set eyes, Slugger Sweigert would surely remark it, ere the fight began the following day, and he would then attempt to aggravate with further blows that cut lip or bruised eye. Truly, a little thing; yet a blinded eye or streaming lip have been known so to bother a man as to lose the contest for him.

The sparring terminated the day's work. The fight-fans crowded out of the barn, discussing among themselves the Gouger's appearance and his chances of winning or losing the following day. As the Gouger swung open the trolley-weighted door of the rub-down room, he beckoned the Kid to follow him.

He was waiting for the Kid, as the boy entered, the dog squeezing in after him. And a far-away look was in his gray eyes—his seconds, had that look made itself visible during a fight, would have called it "the rattle" and shaken their heads.

"Say," he said to the Kid, "once I thought Hackett's gym was a palace, when I used to read about it in the fight-news back East. A palace!" He grunted. "Huh! Looket it, will yuh!"

He pointed about him at a sun-riven chink in the roughly-shingled, slanting, raftered roof; at the paneless window in the side wall, patched up with photographs of men, stripped and in fighting pose; at the antiquated stove, thrumming with heat and sputtering grime; at the rough rub-down tables.

"It's yer own fault, Gouger," spoke up Manager Briggs.

The manager was standing to one side, behind the scales. His red face glossily moist in the sweaty closeness of the little room, he was looking over the arm of the scales, at the Gouger and the Kid, with a surly eye.

"Yep, it's yer own fault," he continued, his mouth bent sourly. "When yuh fust came West, yuh conditioned here. Yuh beat 'Spider' Feeley then, an' ever since yuh've trained here at Hackett's. They won't fix the place up fer yuh an' they don't have to. They know yuh'll come back. 'Cause why? 'Cause yuh believe yuh'll win, if yuh train here. Yer too superstitious a guy, Gouger."

The pugilist laughed easily.

"Oh, I'm used ter it. I guess I've trained in this camp fur every go I've fought in this neck o' the woods, sence I knocked out 'Spider' Feeley in the fifteenth round, ten years ago. An' I oughta be used ter——"

"Come, Gouger," snapped the manager. "Git outa yer duds an' see what yuh weigh today."

Meehan pulled off his gymnasium suit. He was black-haired and hence, by nature, given to browning under the sun; yet because in doing road-work he was always bundled up sudorifically, in order to induce sweating off the pounds of extra weight, he was not tanned. He stood forth then, upon the scales, as white of skin as a babe. He tipped the iron bar at the 135-pound notch.

"Yuh'll have to dry out that extra two pounds between now an' tomorrer, or we'll forfeit our deposit," said Manager Briggs, sharp as ever. "Cut down on the liquids, Gouger—water, soup, an' so forth. The weight's a hundred an' thirty-three pounds, one-half four afore ringside, remember. A couple of shots of water, after weighin' in, will make up the pounds yuh lose today."

The Gouger, stark naked, disappeared into the darkness and slipperiness of the shower-room, as the little boxed-off portion of the rub-down quarters was dignified.

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Came, then, the splash and spray of water on his body. It sounded more like the drip of running oil than of a pure fluid. It sounded thus because of the thick sweat which coated his body.

The Gouger took especial pains to allow the jet to stream on his lean stomach. His stomach was the keystone of the arch of his strength, that he had to render callous to blows, smashes and lifting punches.

Emerging from the shower-room, dripping wet, the Gouger stretched himself contentedly, at full length on his back, on a narrow rub-down table. He enjoyed the soothing, oily lotions rubbed into his body by the lightning-like strokes and pats of his sparring mates. He drew a deep breath of happiness as, his muscles limbering under the process, he felt fresh and vigorous once more.

And then, as if to shatter his happiness, Manager Briggs said:

"Better tell this kid to git a move on, Gouger. This is all fer today. We can't have him hangin' round no longer. Better tell him to move on."

The Gouger threw off the stroking hands of his sparring mates and sat up. His gray eyes flashed in anger like cold stars.

"Yuh heard me once, Briggs. I mean what I say. I've made a dead fall ter thet kid an' he's not goin' ter skid till he wants ter. The kid's goin' ter stick around. He's my mascot fur luck—him an' his hound-dawg. An' he's goin' ter be at the ringside termorrer. Ef he can't swing a towel, he kin pack one of the buckets ennyways."

"You cop!" grunted the manager sulkily. "Yuh're sure a bug fer luck."

The Gouger paid him no heed. His gray eyes were on the Kid and there seemed, now, a warm light in them.

"Kid," he said, "yuh'd like ter see the fight termorrer, now wouldn't yuh? Stick around, you an' the dawg, as mascots ter bring me luck. An' mebbe, ef I come out on top, there'll be a slice of the purse fur yuh, an' you an' the hound-dawg kin take a ride on the cushions fur a change, an' see how it is ter put yer legs under fur three squares a day."

The Kid looked at the white body of the man. He nodded. But he did not look up.

Soon he came out, with the Gouger and the dog, into the road. There was a great red blush upon the western sky where had sunk, behind the trees, the Indian Summer sun. A golden haze was falling upon the road like the chaff from unseen fairy mills, and long shadows were walking out from trees and bushes. Everything seemed very quiet in the peace that comes with sunset.

The three walked along the golden road toward the tavern. And the Kid was very thoughtful. Suddenly, with his deep-sunken blue eyes, the Kid looked up into the gray deep-set eyes of the prize-fighter.

"I don't know, Gouger," he said hesitantly. "I jes' met up with a guy, name of Slim, and he wanted to crack open a safe, and he wanted me to join out with him to bring him luck. And I didn't bring him no luck at all. He put the soup to the peter, all right; but they got Slim. I don't seem to bring no luck to no one."

There showed, in the Frisco Kid's deep-sunk eyes then, the struggle that was being waged within him between desire and doubt. The pugilist stopped abruptly.

"But mine's a straight game, pal," he said argumentatively, seriously. "Of course I've fixed everythin' it's possible ter fix in order ter win, but the fight itself is on the dead level. It's a straight game, I tell yuh. An' mebbe yer luck has changed, Kid. I tole yuh my hunches are usually pretty good. I don't see why I'd git sech a hunch, ef it wasn't so. No," he ended, "don't yuh worry none, son, but stick around till after the fight. Bring me luck, kid, 'cause yer my mascot."

The Frisco Kid looked at the ring-man and his blue eyes livened. The words of the pugilist had put an abrupt quietus to all his fears. He was alive now with desire, with admiration and with awe.

"Sure I will, Gouger," he said happily. "I'll be awful glad to stick around and see yer fight. I'm a blowed-in-the-glass stiff, I am, and I'll never slope—I'll never run out on yer. I'll help yer to a win, Gouger—all we's able, me and——"

A sudden thought that was almost a fear struck the Kid.

"Gouger," he began hesitantly, as if begging some great favor, "can—can Gay-Cat see yer fight, too?"

The Gouger looked down at the yellow dog trotting between them and nodded quickly, his face a smiling fret of wrinkles.

"Gee," muttered the Frisco Kid, "won't I have it on the comets, the tramp royals even, when I hit that next jungle and tell the boes that I helped Gouger Meehan

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to win! They'll never believe we was mascots, Gay-Cat and me!"

CHAPTER IV

"MEBBE I KNOWS WHERE THEY IS!"

THE three ropes, stretched at intervals of a foot and a half above one another from the iron poles at the four corners of the ring, were the bars of his cage, as it were, and like an animal, Slugger Sweigert strode angrily along, with his right hand loosely encircling the topmost cord and sliding up and down over the braids of the strands.

The Slugger was a chunkily-built, leathery-skinned little chap, not more than twenty-one years of age and not over five feet and a quarter in height. He was rangy of shoulder. He had the shoulders of a middleweight, a man fighting at twenty-five pounds more weight and usually half a foot taller. His legs were hairy and stocky, almost heavy. While he had not been in the game long enough to have cauliflower ears, his nose was cracked, smashed to his face, and one cheek bone was more prominent than the other.

Beneath him, in the wooden bowl-shaped open-air arena, the house was seated and packed. A few stragglers were tripping down the aisles, but otherwise every one that held a ticket entitling him to a seat was squatting attentively and impatiently waiting. The hot sun of a California Indian Summer was streaming disturbingly down.

Slugger Sweigert stalked the ring. Twenty-four feet—twenty-four feet—twenty-four feet—twenty-four. . . .

That was the tenth time he had measured the square of it with his footsteps. He strode past his corner. Here were his manager, seconds, folding-stool, buckets and bottles, towels, sponges, fans—all that sort of thing. And all waiting—waiting for fifteen minutes!

He kicked a piece of rosin from under his feet and glanced truculently up the center aisle toward the rude shed that served as the fighter's weighing-in and dressing quarters.

"Don't git hangry, Slugger," his manager called to him in the peculiar nasal Australian accent. "Kype cool, blokey!"

Up in the dressing quarters, as he leisurely drew off his trousers, the Gouger smiled expansively, so that his puffed lips tightened to a normal size. Well he realized what was occurring outside. Those savage glances of the Slugger hurled at this rough outbuilding above his head, he could almost feel. And he smiled again, grimly.

"I can't go no faster, I tell yuh. I know, but I can't help it," he lied deliberately to the nervous, bespectacled youth who was trying to hurry him into the ring. "I've gotta take my time," he pursued. "Everythin' must be jes' so when I climb through the ropes. Aw, the crowd be ——! I'm the one thet's fightin', not them. He is, is he?" he sneered. "Well, thet tea-guzzler won't be near so sore er anxious when I git through with him. Sure, I'll do my best," he ended, "but yuh kin see fur yerself, I can't go no faster!"

The young promoter, who was staging a prize-ring encounter for the first time in his brief career, slammed the misfit door, in leaving, with a bang. Despite all his youth and inexperience, he could not help but see that the Gouger was doing his best to drag and delay the affair.

Surely enough, back in the dressing quarters, Gouger Meehan had paused in removing his trousers to screw up his face into another smile, and wink knowingly at the Frisco Kid who stood, wide of eye, to one side, the yellow dog squatting attentively at his feet. He knew this Queensburry game, did the Gouger. He had not been in it eleven long years for nothing. He had not worked slowly up from the bottom without also learning from the bottom up. And he was but using now one of the tricks of the game to his own advantage.

To get his man unreasonably angry; to have him fight fast and furious, extravagantly expending his strength, in resentment from the opening tap of the gong; to cause him to fight a strength-destroying, self-defeating fight—that was the Gouger's purpose in allowing an interval of time to snail by between the appearance of the Slugger in the ring, and his own appearance. He had his fight to win and, though the crowd ranted and the promoter threatened, he would fight his fight in his own way, the way surest of success.

"Shoot me anuther glass of water, Bud," he said to the red-headed, freckle-faced sparring mate who was acting now as one of his seconds. "I wanta take on a few more pounds over thet 133-notch I jes'

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made, an' water's the quickest way ter turn the trick. My insides is all dry; they'll jes' soak it in."

As he drained the glass, he fidgeted a bit nervously with the towel across his naked thighs.

"Say," he burst out of a sudden, "when are yuh guys ever goin' ter bring my fightin'-trunks?"

"We forgot 'em, Gouger, 'nd Steve's gone back fer 'em. He'll be here enny minute. Briggs went with him in his machine, 'nd they oughta make it in no time. It's only a single mile down the road. I could run it 'nd back in less'n a quarter-hour."

"Well, I won't fight without 'em. I've worn them old green trunks in every fight I've had since I knocked out Spider Feeley in the fifteenth round, back in——"

The misfit of a door complained on its rusty hinges and Steve, the dark-haired second, entered, closely followed by Briggs. Steve was chewing gum, his jaws clicking and snapping very fast as if with some excitement. Briggs's florid face was redder than usual, feverishly, hectically red, and glossy with sweat. He dabbed his brow nervously with a blue silk handkerchief.

"We can't find 'em," he said. "We looked all over yer bloomin' room an' in that barn of a gym, but we couldn't——"

The Gouger's black brows drew down over his eyes, and he swore.

"Hang it, they were strung out ter dry. I washed 'em myself, yisterday mornin'. Bud here wanted ter do it fur me, but I was leary he'd tear 'em. I think an awful lot of them trunks. I've worn 'em in every fight since I knocked out Spider Feeley in the——"

"I know," said Briggs. "An' I saw 'em myself hangin' out to dry behind the gym—let's see—yes, yesterday mornin'."

"So'd I," corroborated Steve. "But they're simply not there. Yer undershirt was there, Gouger, the yeller one an' the socks an' other shirts, but the trunks was plumb gone. The clothes-pins was still on the line. I'll bet some tramp copped 'em."

As though born of the suggestion, Manager Briggs swung round on the Frisco Kid.

"That kid there. Mebbe he took 'em."

The Frisco Kid looked frightened. He was thinking of the faded-green trunks he had robbed from the line of washing behind the gymnasium, the day before, and trying to recollect where he had left them. He remembered having taken them off beneath the porch of the roadhouse; he remembered throwing them on the sand at his feet; but what he could not remember was having seen the trunks on the sand, once he had got into his jeans.

The manager noted the frightened look in the boy's eyes. His own eyes narrowed to black pin-points of suspicion. And he reached over and pulled the Kid by one arm to him.

The dog, at the Kid's feet, watched the man, ears flattened back and the hair along the ridge of his spine rising on end, as the manager, in an effort to see if the trunks were on the boy beneath the blue jeans, felt of the Kid's waist.

"Lay off that stuff!" objected the Gouger sharply. "Whadda yuh think the kid is, Briggs—a yegg thet yuh gotter frisk like a Dick? Thet kid didn't take 'em. Ef any one took 'em, I'll bet it's one of the Slugger's Cockneys. Slugger Sweigert knows I'll win ef I wear them trunks. I've worn 'em in every fight since I knocked out——"

"Mebbe," gulped the Kid, "mebbe I knows where they is. Mebbe I can find 'em for yer."

The manager grabbed the Kid by the shoulders.

"Yuh took 'em! Yuh took 'em, yuh little yegg!" he bit out, and he shook the Kid.

The dog's nostrils quivered and a low growl welled up through his throat ominously.

"Lay off thet stuff, Briggs!" exclaimed the Gouger, leaping to his feet and coming between the manager and the boy. "He says he knows where they are. Thet's all we wanta know."

He turned to the frightened boy and, one black-taped hand holding the towel about his middle, he put the other on the boy's shoulder.

"Kid," he said, a great anxiety shaking his voice, "yuh'll tell us where yuh last saw them trunks, won't yuh?"

The Frisco Kid looked up at the pugilist, then lowered his eyes guiltily and slowly nodded his head. He would have liked to have told all—how he had lost his jeans, while in swimming, and had taken the faded-green trunks from the line to cover his nakedness. But he was not sure he could

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find the trunks now. And should he not find the trunks, the Gouger might lose the fight and blame it all on him. No, he decided, he could not tell all.

He looked up into the gray anxious eyes of the pugilist again, and a wobegone expression was in his own eyes.

"I don't know, Gouger, I don't know jes' where they is. But mebbe—mebbe I can find 'em for yer. I saw 'em last under the porch down—down at Hackett's."

Bruskly the manager interposed.

"You come with me," he said. "I'll drive yuh down an' see if yuh can find 'em. Curse all yer good-luck bosh, anyway, Gouger. Here's more stallin' over a pair o' old trunks. Yuh wait here for us, but you'd better be gittin' inter some others in case we don't find these."

Dragging the Frisco Kid by one arm after him, the dog following and making little threatening growls in his throat, the manager slammed out of the dressing-quarters.

CHAPTER V

THE BELL CLANGS

BY THE time the manager brought the low-hung racing-motor to a halt before Hackett's roadhouse, the Frisco Kid and the dog in his lap were coated thickly with brown dust.

Briggs sprang out. He jerked the Kid off the seat to the ground with such suddenness that the Gay-Cat rolled out of the Kid's lap and landed on his back in the dust of the road.

"Now yuh git 'em!" he commanded savagely.

The Frisco Kid followed the line of the house toward the porch over the stream in the rear. He was filled with hideous doubts. The dog slunk at his heels.

Coming down upon the bank of the stream, he turned and made beneath the porch. A little puddle of water lay black in the sand of the bank. There was where he had wrung out the jeans upon finding them. But no faded-green fighting-trunks were near.

Where they had gone to he could not remember. He thought he might have thrown them out into the stream and that they might be caught about one of the stilts upholding the porch, even as his jeans once had been caught. He sloshed in his sockless shoes through the water and searched about the piles beneath the porch. They were not there.

He searched along the bank again. He was in a panic. He ran into the dark up the bank beneath the porch. He lighted the precious matches he always carried for his cigarets. They were nowhere to be found.

He came out at last, a harassed look in his deep-sunk eyes, his tan face pale and slick with dust and the sweat of anguished dread. The manager was awaiting him on the bank just beyond the porch. The Kid shook his head as a sign of his defeat. He could say no word.

Briggs sprang at the Kid as if to strike him down. But on the instant, as the dog growled deep and menacingly in his throat, he thought better of it. He turned away, his thick lower lip between his white, clenched teeth.

"Curse the Gouger an' his good-luck bosh!" he muttered. "We'll have to go back without his trunks. That's all there is to it."

He spun round once again on the Frisco Kid, his heels digging savagely into the sand.

"I'd leave yuh behind, yuh little yegg, only—only I'm afraid the Gouger'd throw the skids under this fight. It's bad enough to lose his old trunks. Now I can't take any chances on him throwin' this fight jes' because o' the loss of a thievin' kid mascot. Come along, yuh yegg!" And he flung toward the car.

The Frisco Kid followed, very subdued, and the Gay-Cat sniffed almost guiltily at his heels. All the way to the arena, the manager cursed the Gouger and the Gouger's superstitions. The Kid sensed that the manager feared that the Gouger might not fight, had he not the faded-green trunks to wear.

But when they reached the bowl-shaped open-air arena, they found that the Gouger was already in the ring. Come of their impatience, the waiting crowd had created so much disturbance and the young promoter had become so insistent that the Gouger had thought it wisest to don a new pair of fighting-trunks and appear before them.

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour after Slugger Sweigert had crouched through the ropes, Gouger Meehan had emerged from his dressing quarters. He had not run down the aisle as the Slugger

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had done, a distance of two hundred feet. He had ridden on the swarthy back of Steve, while Bud, the other second, had brought up the rear with buckets, sponges, towels and a folding-stool.

When, finally, they had reached the roped enclosure, Bud had opened the folding stool in the Gouger's corner and, instantly, the Gouger had sat down on it. He was crowding all the knowledge gained through his eleven ring years—as much of it at least, as he possibly could—into this one fight. And to begin with, he was conserving his strength.

Now, as Manager Briggs, followed by the Kid and his trailing dog, came down the slope of the aisle toward the elevated ring, the Gouger sat and watched his opponent. The Slugger was standing up in his corner with a frown on his face, his hands on the angle of the topmost rope and his feet crunching under him lumps of rosin, preparatory to rubbing the granules upon the soles of his shoes. The Gouger felt like advising, "Have yer beef-chewin' seconds do it!" but instead he only smiled grimly. Here was another way in which the Slugger was uselessly expending his strength.

As Slugger Sweigert seated himself, scraped his shoes in the granulated rosin and glowered across the ring, Manager Briggs pulled his bulk through the ropes behind the Gouger.

"I guess they jes' died of old age, Gouger. We couldn't find 'em, anywheres," he said with a forced and anxious attempt at jocundity.

A shadow crossed the Gouger's face and he made to speak; but at that moment the Slugger bellowed across the diagonal of the ring, his voice quavering with poorly suppressed anger—

"Yuh bloody, stinkin' bloater, Hi'll teach yuh not to kype me w'ytin'!"

The Gouger smiled wryly.

"Jes' in the mood I want him," he murmured. "He's a nice-mannered Cockney, he is." His battered face darkened. "I guess I won't need them trunks after all, Briggs," he said, looking up at the manager. "I'll make thet tea-drinkin' tin-eared boob eat them names!"

Briggs breathed an audible sigh of relief.

"That's the stuff, Gouger!" he said with what seemed hypocritical encouragement. "Give 'im the boots with both hands fer them names, an' you'll win!"

Bud, the Gouger's red-headed second, was in Slugger Sweigert's corner, examining the surgical bandages on the latter's hands. Sweigert's manager was doing the same in the Gouger's angle of the ring. It was merely a precautionary move against either man carrying anything stouter than knuckles beneath the bandages and black tape.

While it was in progress, the Gouger twisted his oddly-shaped head around. He saw the Frisco Kid standing below him with the yellow dog in his arms, and both boy and dog looking very bewildered in all the crowd. And his gray eyes lighted and his face screwed up into a myriad of wrinkles.

"Thet's the idea, kid," he said encouragingly. "You stay right there. Ef there's a bottle er a sponge er a fan needed, yuh sling it up. An' wish me luck, kid—wish me luck all the time, every round!"

A tall, stout, white-haired old man whose deep chest concealed a voice of megaphone volume—the official announcer—swung through the ropes with a set of boxing-gloves in his hands.

"Hurry up, boys," he urged, throwing a pair in either direction.

How light the five-ounce calfskins felt to the Gouger after the daily weight of the large gymnasium gloves! While Steve was lacing them on his hands, he looked over the second's shoulder at the ring-men who were flocking through the ropes from all sides.

Most of them he knew; not a few, he had defeated once and several times; and, as an honest opinion, he would say that Slugger Sweigert was the toughest nut of the lot. Beat him, and his fears of being forced down among the second-raters could be laid away in lavender for some time.

"Ben Furley, the California Cyclone, challenges the winner!" bawled the announcer from the center of the ring. "Loco Rafferty challenges the winner. The Saginaw Slasher, Jack Oleson, challenges the winner for a thousand dollars a side. Clyde Dean, Red Jim Brady, Mickey Maharg challenge the winner. Say, how many more of you, anyhow?" He swung upon them.

There still remained a half-dozen to be introduced. There were always more youngsters, longing for the first-rate pugilist's insecure seat in the Hall of Fame, arduously bending every effort toward that goal, the apex of their dreams. And then,

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when the aged announcer was hoarse from hurling defies, a newsman at the ringside, with a telegrapher and a direct wire to his office at his side, looked up and said:

"Jerry, just got a telegram at the office from Hugh Belcher, challenging the winner. He's willing to bet five thousand dollars on the side."

The announcer nodded his white head, moved largely to the center of the ring, lifted his hand for silence, got it, and cried:

"Hughie Belcher of Pontypool—the Welsh Ter-rr-ror—challenges the winner for five thousand dollars a side!"

Another prize-fighter elbowed toward him to be introduced and to submit his challenge, but the announcer coldly ignored him.

"Come on, you fellers," he called testily to the two principals.

Slugger Sweigert tossed his robe aside and sprang forward. The Gouger rose leisurely, tucked his old dressing-gown closer about him, stepped easily to the center. Sweigert had crouched into fighting pose. His manager came up and threw the robe about him.

Erect, wrapped snugly in his gown, the Gouger waited for the signal from the newspaper photographers that they were ready to snap. Then, and not before, did he throw off his dressing-gown and, planting himself firmly up on his feet, crouch and extend his arms in fighting posture. The four cameras snapped in unison, and the next instant he was erect again and in his dressing-gown.

"Give us another," cried a precautious newspaper photographer, and it was done.

But through it all the Gouger, unlike his more youthful opponent, was ever calm, ever careful of himself, of uselessly expending his golden strength.

They were introduced to the spectators, a pure matter of formality, as both were better known than the governor of the state.

"The Glory of Rushcutter's Bay, the Australian Avalanche, Slugger Sweigert!" roared the announcer.

And then—

"The Old Master, the Pride of Garry Owen, the best 133-pound boy on the Coast, Gouger Meehan!"

The crowd had shouted and stamped and clapped for the Slugger. They thundered at this last:

"Good boy, old Gouger!" "Show him you're not an old 'un yet!" and such dubious encouragements swelled up from the bowl-shaped arena.

Silencing the crowd after a time, the announcer brought forth a short pock-fretted man, a former lightweight fighter, whom he introduced as "the Greatest Exponent of Fair Play in the West, Thady Burke, who will referee this contest!"

The referee went into one angle of the ring, the men back to their respective corners. The folding-stools, buckets, and other paraphernalia had been removed and the pugilists stood, now, in the diametric angles of the ropes, white-bodied and naked save for the trunks about their middles, their eyes conning each other, their gloved hands at their sides. Everything was ready and waiting for the signal to lay on.

The white-haired announcer moved grandly across the roped arena, his right hand raised.

"Gentlemen!" he boomed. "This—will be a twen-ty-round contest—br-rr-eak—at the order of the referee—" his body half through the ropes, he flourished his hand—"let 'er go!"

The bell clanged. The three men within the ring acted as on one impulse.

The pugilists strode quickly to the center, closely followed by the referee, barely touched each other's right glove in a species of handclasp, half circled. For a moment more they fiddled about each other. Then, like some bird of prey, the Slugger darted in and jabbed the Gouger upon the bulb of the nose with his right glove. The fight was on.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIGHT

THE Frisco Kid's eyes were spread in their deep-sunk sockets, and his neck-apple felt thick and round in his throat. He watched the Gouger, the Gay-Cat held awkwardly before him and very tight in his arms. He saw the Gouger shake his egg-shaped head and, by way of retorting to that jab, hook the other man before he could step away, at the same time blocking a right cross to the heart.

With a rush bespeaking anger, Slugger Sweigert came on. He jabbed, he swung, he crossed, he hooked—he blocked never. He had little need to. The Gouger was

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doing a sufficiency of that for both of them.

Meehan was covering his stomach, barricading his face, or tapping the Slugger on the biceps, as this arm or that shot forward for a blow. Blocking always, and all blows almost. Ducking, backing, stepping this way and that, but seldom countering. The Gouger's defense was masterly, if not impregnable. It bore mute testimony to his clear head and eleven years in the square circle.

There was the difference. Had the Slugger but a tithe of the Gouger's wisdom and ring generalship, he would not be fighting as he was fighting. But the Gouger had seen to that. He had his man angry, revengeful, irrational.

Anything for a win! That was the Gouger's code. Anything, even if it be a trifle shady—anything for a win! His dilatory tactics had been one of the things which made for a win. His present system of engaging was another. He had his man fighting a whirlwind, strength-destroying, self-defeating battle, that was a third. And there were more to come.

"Last ten seconds!" shouted Steve from the corner of the ring, at the end of the second round, making ready to throw in the folding-stool and buckets.

At that, the Gouger worked, backing and filling, toward his corner. At that, Slugger Sweigert pressed him hard and harder. At the bell, the next moment, the Gouger sat plump down upon the stool in his corner.

He looked up and smiled tauntingly at the sweating Slugger. His back against the iron pole, his arms raised on the angle of the topmost rope, his legs spread wide on the lowest, he was being invigoratingly sponged and fanned, what time the Slugger still was striding across the canvas floor to his corner.

The Gouger turned his oddly-shaped head and smiled significantly at the awestruck Kid.

"Did yuh wish me luck them rounds, Kid?"

"Sure," muttered the boy stoutly. "Sure I did, Gouger. And the Gay-Cat—he wished yer luck, too, Gouger."

The bell brought the men together for round number three, but not in the center of the enclosure. The Gouger had taken but five slow steps from his corner in the while that the Slugger had rushed, like a gust of wind, toward him.

They met, and the Slugger backed the Gouger as far as the angle of his corner would permit. There the Slugger lived up to his name. He slugged away at the blocking Gouger until the latter, somehow and cleverly, worked out of the corner.

The Slugger was after him then, like a wildcat. Clear across the diagonal of the ring, into his own corner, the Slugger hammered the Gouger until the angle of the ropes once more intervened in the backward rush.

The Gouger could not block the multiple blows which were showering, fast and stronger than hail upon him. A crack of the Slugger's glove caught him on the point of the jaw below the ear. He felt a severe pang shoot through his head, seeming to lift the roof off his head. A fur of blackness closed over his eyes. As he tottered, something crashed into his stomach like the head of a battering ram. He doubled up and there, upon the wet and rosined canvas floor of the Slugger's corner, he went down, inert.

"Three! Four!" the official timekeeper was shrieking from the ringside, as the Gouger aroused to a semi-consciousness. In lower tones, immediately above him, the pock-fretted referee was doing the same, his pudgy right hand falling with each count.

Afar, beyond the diametric corner of the ring, the Frisco Kid clutched the dog to his chest and watched through the intolerable seconds, his blue eyes whelmed with an anguish of fear for the Gouger.

"He's got the Gouger!" he muttered, his lips beating dryly together. "The Slugger's got the Gouger, Gay-Cat, and—and it's all 'cause the Gouger didn't wear them lucky trunks!"

"Five! Six!"

The Gouger strove to rise.

"Stay down! Git a rest! Take yer time! Gather!" in his seconds' voices, shrill with an intensity of excitement.

"Seven! Eight!"

The Gouger got to his knees, his gloved hands still upon the canvas flooring, but the glassy look quickly fleeing his eyes, as some of his senses came back to him.

"He ain't out yet!" exclaimed the Frisco Kid. "The Gouger ain't out yet. Yer'll beat 'im, Gouger! Get up, get——"

The Kid stopped shortly, as if the words had been sucked down his throat. A sudden and unaccountable action upon the part of the Gouger had stopped him.

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The Gouger had turned the backs of his gloves upon the wet and rosined canvas floor of the Slugger's corner and now, his senses gathering, amid all the excitement within and without the square circle, beneath the very eyes of the Slugger's seconds and manager, he was rubbing the backs of those gloves, slowly, surreptitiously, over the rosin on the floor.

"Nine!"

The Gouger was up. He was crouching low, gloves over ears and head, elbows protecting his stomach, and lurching toward the Slugger for a clinch. Just then the bell rang.

The Gouger did not appear to hear the bell. But that came, undoubtedly, of his cauliflower ears. He tried for a blow at the Slugger's face. The Slugger stopped the blow with his forearm and shoved him toward his corner.

He understood then. The crowd was on its feet, hissing, catcalling, attempting by boos and scurrility to show that he had outraged their sense and tenets of fair play. He paid them no heed, for all the truth as if he did not hear them. He staggered into his corner.

His wits were still a bit wool-gathering. Those cracks on jaw and stomach had been no love-taps. But still, withal, he had retained a certain canniness, a trick of reasoning resultant from his many long years of fighting. As his seconds sweated as never before, with soaking sponges and fans and revivers, he warned them sharply:

"Git away from my gloves. Don't rub 'em er drop enny more water on 'em. I'm goin' ter try the Kid McCoy trick. I rubbed them gloves in the rosin when I was down. I wanta tear the skin off his beak with the rosin on them gloves. He almost got me in thet last frame, but I'm gonna git him now fur callin' me names!"

THE fourth round opened with the Gouger striving hard to tear the skin of Sweigert's face and body with the rosin on his gloves, brittle as glass crums. But the rosined gloves appeared to have little effect upon the weather-toughened skin of the Slugger. He suffered only a scratch or two about the broken nose. And the rosin quickly wore off the Gouger's gloves.

Now, perhaps it was that the Slugger had tired himself—fought himself out, as sporting parlance has it—in trying to do for the Gouger in the prior round. He did not open up in this fourth inning, sufficiently to inflict a staggering blow on the Gouger, let alone knock him down again. And by the time the round was ended, the Gouger had won a long way back to himself.

The intervening one-minute rest-period capped his recovery. Once more, when the fifth round opened, was he clear-headed and calculating. He remembered then, as in a vivid flash, all he had to forfeit by a loss, and he thanked his good-luck stars that the bell had terminated the third round when it had. Over and over again, he thanked his good-luck stars.

"It's the kid what's done it," rang through his superstitious head. "It's the kid an' his hound-dawg wishin' me luck!"

No more than he had opened up in the fourth and fifth rounds did the Slugger open up in the sixth frame. He must have tired himself considerably in trying to do for the Gouger in that third round. It might be that he had injured one of his hands in delivering that battering-ram blow into the Gouger's stomach. But, in either case, the fact remained that the Slugger seemed unable to follow up that knock-down of the third round. This fact was not without a certain effect upon the Gouger.

As he had not opened up since the starting gong of all had clanged, the Gouger opened up now. He set the pace. He jabbed his man, tilting his head backward like a reed before the wind. He jabbed him again, yet again; then, having him as he wanted him, he cut loose on the body and, by punch upon shattering punch, backed the Slugger, at a fast clatter, full across the ring into the ropes.

Here was exhibited why the Gouger had refused to fight, should his three-rope proviso not be complied with. Two ropes, and the retreating man would back through them and be upheld, from falling into the ringside, by the aroused and standing spectators beneath.

The Gouger could not punch him then. He would have to play the cavalier—a bit of clap-trap—and extending one of his gloved hands (with which he was supposed, according to the rules, only to fight) gallantly draw his opponent back into the ring. And that would be more than a useless outlay of strength. It would be to put himself in wraps, stave off the finish of the fight,

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and probably save the other man from a knockout, then and there.

True, shouts of approval at the gallantry of such conduct would be excited from the crowd; bits of clap-trap always excite shouts of approval from crowds; but that did not win him his fight. The same crowd would shout more loudly, were the Slugger to come back, immediately after, and knock him—the cavalier—out.

But with the three ropes, there was the game! The other man could not slip through them. They formed a veritable net behind him—top rope back of the shoulders, middle at the base of the spine, and the lowest rope behind the crotch of the knees. Everything for a win!

The Gouger had his man so, cringing, doubled up, one arm before the face, the other wrapped about the stomach.

The Gouger stood off, his left glove on the Slugger's shoulder. He drew back his right arm, measured, and let fly. The Slugger's midriff caved in and he dropped instantly, like an ox felled in the shambles. Three seconds later, against the frantic advice of his manager and seconds, he was up again, staggering.

The spectators were on their feet, waving hats, canes, gloves, and shouting distractedly from throats sanded with excitement.

"Git him, Gouger! He's groggy!"

"Biff 'im on th' kisser!"

"Now's yer time!"

"Give 'im the half-scissors hook, the Gouger's famous half-scissors hook!"

"Don't take all day! He's all in!"

"Stall, blokey, stall through th' round. Hi've bet on yuh to st'y tin rounds with 'im!"

"Hang a haymaker on him, old boy!"

"Give him th' one-two!"

"Take it easy, Gouger! Keep yer head!" called Manager Briggs across the ring, his voice thick and shaky, the blood pouring into his face with overwrought emotion. "Follow up careful. Place yer blows, man, place yer blows!"

The Frisco Kid's chin was pressed against the ropes along the edge of the ring which bound down the canvas cover on the flooring.

"Yer got him, Gouger!" he half sobbed with joy and intense excitement.

"Yer can lick him, one hand! Put him out! Put him out!"

The Kid felt the canvas-covered flooring vibrate, as the Gouger rushed in to finish his man.

The Slugger jabbed at the Gouger's face in a desperate but feeble effort to keep him off. He could not keep him off. The Gouger closed with him and pummeled him about the reddened region of the stomach with hook after half-scissors hook. It was the Gouger's famous right-hand punch to the stomach. The Gouger was trying for the solar plexus and a knockout.

He was trying arduously for a knockout, the while he could feel himself tiring. His feet were sore from gripping the flooring, his legs weary, and he could feel the muscles standing out on his arms and he could feel those arms, heavy as bars of lead. Although he realized that the sound undoubtedly saved the Slugger from a knockout yet it was with a grunt of distinct relief that he caught, of a sudden on the wind, the terminating sound of the bell.

He was worn out. He had tried supremely.

He stretched himself in his corner with a heavy sigh, closed his eyes, and sought comfort in relaxation. He must needs get as much out of this one-minute rest-period as he possibly could. The next round would find him bang up against his hardest task. He must knock out his man in that next round, or the pace would kill him and the Slugger, strong with the resilience of youth, would get the credit of it.

He caught a squeaky voice from near at hand:

"Didn't I tell yuh? He's old, the Gouger is. He'll have to give way to the young feller. We all do, we old 'uns."

Vaguely the remarks incensed the Gouger. He was too weary to open his eyes and see who had uttered them. He listened.

"Nuthin' of the kind," objected an impudent voice. "This old boy's gonna win. Anyway, that's the way my money's bet."

"Yuh lookit here, young feller. If the Gouger wasn't old, wouldn't he have settled the Slugger's hash in that last inning? He had Sweigert dazed, dead to rights. There was a time when I saw him knock out a man with two blows when he had him so——"

"Who was that?"

"Jim Bristoe, Nigger Jim, that was. But he's too old now, the Gouger, and the other feller's too young and good. Did yuh see him take all the Gouger had, with only one flip-flop?"

"You're right there, pap."

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"I tell yuh, I know a thing or two about this game, my boy. The Slugger will come back the next round, sure as yuh live, and as strong as a bull. Yuh jes' watch. The Gouger's all in. That last frame was too much for him. He put in his best licks then. He can't do it again."

"Aw, the Gouger'll come back all right, all right."

"My boy, I know a thing or two about this game. I was followin' the game afore yuh was born. The old-timers can't come back. They never have in the past. It takes youth to come back. That's one of the things I know."

The Gouger troubled now to open his eyes, shift on his stool and gaze out between the ropes. He saw, below him and but two rows away, a weazened old man in a frock coat and a pink-complexioned unbearded youth. And the odd part of it all was that the old man, paradoxically, was upholding the power of youth over age and the young one, just the reverse.

But was it true? Had the old man spoken wisdom, the youth, youth's customary folly? The Gouger had to admit to himself, now that it was pointed out, that he should have done better in that last round—that he should have knocked his man cold when he had him in such a bad way. Truly enough, when he had had Nigger Jim groggy, in that fight years before, he had knocked him out with two clean blows. The recollection stirred up within him something that was like anger and yet was akin to apprehension.

"Say, whadda yuh think I am!" he rasped out at Bud. "A sponge, thet yuh've thrown all thet water over me? Cut it out, will yuh!"

Then he saw the Frisco Kid, standing so frail and nervously attentive in his over-large coat below him, the alert yellow dog hugged in his arms, and his sun-tanned face white in the draw of the excitement he was going through. The Gouger's battle-hacked face wreathed into the wrinkles of a pathetic smile.

"Kid," he said huskily, "yuh'll wish me luck the next round, huh? Wish me luck, Kid, like yuh never did afore!"

The Kid looked up, his eyes great in their deep-sunken pits.

"Aw, say, Gouger," he gulped. "Aw, say now, Gouger. I'm a-wishin' yer luck like everythin' all the time!"

The Gouger turned away, his gray eyes filmy.

"What round's comin' up?" he asked.

"The seventh," returned Bud, wiping the water off his heaving chest.

The seventh! He used to have some luck in the seventh. It was in the seventh round of that fight, in Butte, Montana, that he had knocked out Jim Bristoe, Nigger Jim. It was enough. He would win in that next round. It was the seventh—his lucky round!

He felt fresher at the thought, albeit his arms did ache a little. He wished, all at once and quite unaccountably, that he had, about his waist, that old pair of faded-green trunks. Then the bell.

He would finish it speedily. With the one-minute rest, he should now be in condition to trim the Slugger in no time. The Slugger had called him names!

He strode forward. The Slugger was awaiting him in the center. He strode forward and, almost without bothering to put up his props or feint, he caught the Slugger a right-hander on the side of the head.

The Slugger had called him names! He followed it up quickly. He lifted the Slugger with a smash in the stomach. He was maliciously angry. He would pay the Slugger back for those names. At the same time, he would do what he had failed to do in the previous round. It would be the Jim Bristoe fight over again. With two clean blows, he would put the Slugger out. It was his lucky round.

Again he lifted the Slugger with a half-scissors hook. The Slugger came on, his gloved hands flailing the blocking left forearm of the Gouger. The Gouger worked fast and hard. Again he clipped the Slugger a revengeful right-hander on the side of the head.

The Slugger shook his head. He came on. God, he was smiling!

"That th' best yuh got, yuh bleedin', glass-armed bloater!"

The Slugger feinted, as he cursed, and as if in contempt pushed his left glove slap into the Gouger's face. For the instant the Gouger could not see. He was momentarily rattled. He attempted to cover up.

The Slugger's right glove coiled round his back to his kidney. The Gouger felt the blow jar through his digestive organs, thud against his navel, run agonizingly up his spine. He snapped erect. He hugged his left glove to his side in a try to shield the exposed kidney with the crook of his projecting elbow.

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The Slugger shifted with a swiftness amazing and, with a squash that sounded sickening, his left glove coiled round the Gouger's back to his other kidney.

The impact of the blow hit the base of the Gouger's brain with the force of a bludgeon. His head reeled and he rocked upon his feet. Desperately he lurched forward, head bent, arms up weakly in fighting fashion. The life was gone from his arms. He tried to get close to the Slugger. He rested his chin on the sweat and blood of the Slugger's shoulder, and—he could not help it—his eyes closed.

He felt done for. Yet he did not want to show it. He smote the Slugger in the stomach with his left hand. There seemed little force to the blow. His extensor muscles ached and feared to act, his arms were numb and heavy as though water-logged. But he continued to piston his heavy arms into the Slugger's stomach, the while, using another trick of the ring in an attempt to conceal his feebleness, his breath drawing cavernously through his lungs, he talked wearily and disjointedly to the Slugger.

"Yuh would—call—me names, huh? I've got yuh—now—yuh tin-eared boob! How'd the canvas feel—thet last round? Sorter soft, what? Well—here's where—yuh hit it again—*ugh!*"

The Slugger's right glove ripped up under his chin, uppercutting him, lifting him upon his toes, shaking every brain-cell in his head, shocking painfully, like overcharged wires, every nerve that ran through his body from those brain-cells. The white form of the Gouger, so piteously like a babe's, doubled up momentarily like a tenpenny nail that had been hit glancingly by a sledge-hammer.

The Slugger drew away. As he felt the Slugger draw away, the Gouger straightened and his eyes opened hurriedly in a terrible dismay. He stumbled after the Slugger. And there was in his stark gray eyes now little sign of knowledge, in the flail-like arms he held out gropingly, hardly a vestige of strength.

The Slugger continued to keep away. He kept just so far away. He smashed fist after fist into the Gouger's stomach. He pounded the Gouger again and yet again, into the ropes, out of the ropes and, reeling and groggy, across the ring.

Back, back went the Gouger, his head rolling on a neck that seemed too weak to uphold it, his feet not lifting up and down, but apparently unable to leave the canvas flooring—dragging like the feet of a fly caught on gummed paper.

The Slugger was after him.

With squashy sounds, the Slugger thudded his wet gloves against the Gouger's stomach that was red as an angry crater, into the Gouger's blood-smeared face that showed no human intelligence. Step by step, blow upon blow, he forced the Gouger into the ropes, out of the ropes, and around and around the ring. The Gouger was like a man sick with liquor; too drunk to defend himself, seeking only rest, the Slugger like some pitiless white machine that forced him relentlessly, that crooked and sped its arms mercilessly. It was abominable!

"Put him out!"

"Lean on 'im, Slugger! This ain't no vycytion!"

"What kind of a manager are yuh, Briggs! Throw in th' sponge, yuh slave-driver!"

"Come on, Slugger!"

"Haven't yuh enny punch, yuh zob?"

"Drop, Gouger, old boy! You've had enough!"

The Slugger pulled back his left, calculated rapidly, let go. He caught the Gouger flush upon the nib of the jaw. For an agonizing trice, the Gouger shivered on his toes, then slapped down upon his face.

"One! Two!" shrieked the official timekeeper at slow second intervals, his blazing eye on his stop-watch, his hand knotted with excitement about the lever of the bell.

The pock-fretten referee above the Gouger tolled off the unendurable seconds with the fall of his pudgy hand.

But the Gouger did not move. Feverishly Bud and Steve, his seconds, dipped their sponges into the buckets and spattered water on him. The Gouger did not move.

"Three! Four!"

The Slugger walked around warily, watching the white form upon the wet and rosined canvas like a spider that is not sure its victim is dead, but only simulating death. Manager Briggs clung to the lowest rope of the angle of the ring, his face no longer red, his mouth stiffly open. Steve chewed feverishly, audibly. The Frisco Kid clutched the dog frantically tight in his arms. The crowd stood on its seats.

"Five!"

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A tremor, as of pain, shook through the white form of the Gouger.

"Six!"

His arms bent under him and he humped up on those bent arms, his chin still digging into the canvas.

"Seven!"

He swung dizzily on all-fours, his eyes stark and staring, his head lolling like the head of an animal mortally wounded.

"Eight!"

The referee, with his free left hand, held back the Slugger.

"Nine!" shrilled the timekeeper. His eye was on the stop-watch. He jerked the lever. The bell clanged. The round was ended.

CHAPTER VII

ACCORDING TO HIS CASTE

THE round had ended not an ace too soon. The Gouger never could have arisen at the unuttered count of ten. The bell had given him a new lease on life, a longer tenure of fighting. Now, of a certainty, it was up to the Gouger either to recover a deal of his strength and faculties, in the allotted one-minute interval of rest, or return for the next round groggy and weak and already beaten.

He tottered into his corner on the arms of his two seconds and dropped like a dead weight upon the folding stool. The Slugger turned away, a broad smile expanding his mouth and, as he pranced into his corner, debonairly greeted some friend at the ringside.

The radical contrast in the aspect of the two pugilists, at the end of that seventh round, was not without visible effect upon the Frisco Kid. He looked up at the trembling white body of the Gouger, slumped upon stool and ropes above him, and his deep-sunk eyes seemed stunned as by some terrible knowledge.

"He's done for, the Gouger!" he muttered sorrowfully into the ear of the dog in his arms. "He can't win. And it's all my fault, Gay-Cat. I lost them green trunks on him, and he can't win without them lucky trunks. It's all my fault. I's a blowed-in-the-glass stiff no more, Gay-Cat. I've fallen down on the Gouger like a measly termater-can bum!"

There was a vast soberness in the Kid's words. He felt he was no longer an aristocrat of the road, a blown-in-the-glass stiff. It is an unwritten law of the high inner caste of blown-in-the-glass stiffs to help a friend when that friend is down and out, when that friend is a down-pin. And the Frisco Kid felt he had not lived up to the law. He had lost the Gouger's lucky green trunks. He felt he had lost for the Gouger, thereby, this fight. He was no longer a blown-in-the-glass stiff. He was a bum, a tomato-can bum, one of a low, vile and faithless caste.

"Yuh'll have to stall, Gouger!" Manager Briggs was saying, above him, to the slowly reviving pugilist. "Yuh'll have to stall. I've got money on yuh to last ten rounds with the Slugger. Yuh sure can last that long, Gouger. It's only three frames more. Stall through, old man, an' win that money fer me!"

There was something in the advice which encouraged and yet hurt the Frisco Kid.

"I wonder, now," he muttered, "I wonder jes' how long the Gouger can stall. I hate to think of the Gouger havin' to stall, but mebbe if he could only stall long enough, mebbe then we'd have time, Gay-Cat and me, to run back and find them lucky trunks for him!"

He looked up, a great hope dawning in his deep-sunk eyes.

"I'll bet if he had them lucky trunks—I'll bet then the Gouger wouldn't have to stall no more. He'd lick that other guy, one hand! And then we'd be blowed-in-the-glass stiffs again, Gay-Cat and me. We'd 'a' helped the Gouger to a win!"

His eyes dropped hopefully and with grave question to the yellow dog in his arms. The Gay-Cat whimpered softly; but whether from pity for the Gouger or with pain at being held so tightly in the boy's arms, the Kid did not know. He took it to mean assent. And a tremendous idea that partook of the nature of an inspiration bourgeoned, on the sudden, in his brain.

"Gay-Cat!" he whispered excitedly. "Does *you* know where them lucky trunks is! Did *you* hide 'em, old hobo!"

He lifted up the dog. He could feel the dog's stump of a tail beating against his chest now, as if in a frantic effort to make answer. It was as if the dog were attempting to convey, in this manner, some message to him, his tail beating out, like a telegraph instrument, the dots and dashes of the words he could not express.

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Yes, the dog understood. It was wonderful. But the dog understood how direfully necessary it was to find those lucky green fighting-trunks. The dog was a blown-in-the-glass stiff, too! He would help the Gouger to a win! He would aid the Kid in finding those lucky trunks!

The Frisco Kid plucked at the sleeve of the manager, who was hanging on to the ropes above him and attempting to whisper, in his heavy voice, words of advice into the Gouger's ear.

The Kid wet his lips in nervous preparation. He purposed making a great request of Briggs; he wanted to ask the manager to drive him back to Hackett's, once again, in his racing-car.

Briggs swung his big slick face around. He saw the Frisco Kid. And his large mouth bent in a snarl, and he prodded the Kid away with one foot.

"G'wan, yuh little yegg!" he snapped. "The Gouger don't know yuh no more. Beat it!"

The Frisco Kid turned, then, to make up the center aisle of the arena and, alone and unaided, back to Hackett's, a mile distant. As he did, to the stretched-out white body above him, he breathed:

"We's gonna find them lucky trunks for yer, Gouger. Jes' you stall. And don't think we're quittin' yer cold, like termatercan bums. We're blowed-in-the-glass stiffs we are, Gay-Cat and me, and we stick by our friends. We'll be back with them trunks in no time. And then yer won't have to stall, Gouger! Then yer can lick him, one hand!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE INEVITABLE VICTOR

AT A killing pace, the Frisco Kid started along the brown road. Hackett's was a goodly mile away. Where the road wound about great fields, he cut across through the mustard and tule and disheveled stalks of corn. He ran at top pitch. He climbed fences; he sloshed through the sogginess of truck gardens; he paused never.

And the Gay-Cat ran before him. He wriggled beneath the fences; he led the way through the weeds and corn; and he stopped, now and anon, to look back and beckon the Kid on. Indeed, he seemed to enjoy the run as though it were altogether fine fun.

"Gay-Cat," puffed the Kid very soberly, slowing for the while to a jog trot, "we's not off, free-like, on a tramp, now. And yer gotta help find 'em, old hobo. We're blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, we are, and the Gouger's our friend. He was good to us, Gay-Cat. We can't go back on him now, and him needin' us so bad-like. We're blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, old-timer, and we stick by our friends!"

Boy and dog ran on, very fast. They passed, after a time, the red dusty barn of a gymnasium which squatted in the field of mustard weeds. Around the bend of the road they came to the white two-storied building that was Hackett's roadhouse and, following the line of the house, they emerged at last upon the sandy bank of the stream.

The dog ran before the boy, under the porch, his tragic stump of a tail stiffly erect. The Kid's face was very serious as, once again, he felt to searching the sand of the bank beneath the porch. The dog watched him impatiently for a brief moment, then turned and darted up the bank into the darkness under the house.

A short sharp little bark surprised the Frisco Kid. It came from the dark beneath the house. The Kid vaulted, at that bark, into a quick excitement.

"It's Gay-Cat. And I'll bet he's found somethin'! Gay-Cat, Gay-Cat!" he called. "Where is yer?"

The dog bounded against the Kid's legs, tossing something in his jaw from side to side and growling playfully. What it was, the Kid could not discern in the semi-darkness; but, his brown face almost a white with some violent emotion, he grabbed at the dog. The Gay-Cat darted out from beneath the porch into the sunlight of the bank.

The Frisco Kid came out, his face very pale, his hands patting the air to reassure the dog. The Gay-Cat approached and laid the something in his jaws upon the sand of the bank at the Kid's feet. He cocked his yellow head triumphantly. At the Kid's feet lay a pair of old faded-green fighting-trunks!

Slowly the Frisco Kid picked them up. All color seemed to have been sucked from his face; his face, now, was ghastly with pallor. He examined the trunks with a pitiful anxiety. The trunks were soiled

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from being buried in the ground, and they were terribly torn where the teeth of the dog had ripped and slashed in worrying and playing with them.

The Kid shook his head ruefully.

"I don't know that the Gouger can wear 'em," he muttered, "but we'll bring 'em back to him, anyways. We's blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, Gay-Cat, and we gotta do our best! And mebbe—mebbe, if he'd only tie them round him—mebbe then he could win, one hand!"

The Frisco Kid started back along the brown road toward the open-air arena. The soiled and hopelessly torn trunks were wrapped in a tight bundle under his left arm. And he felt very weary. But that which was under his left arm sped him on in a hot, panicky run.

Running as if fresh, his short, numbly-tired legs lifting and pounding without sensation, as if they were parts of a machine that had been wound up and could not run down, clambering over and under fences, sloshing between cabbages and tomatoes, clattering over leaves, stones, roots, along the straight lengths of dusty road, through the weeds and corn of the fields where the road curved in and out, doggedly back the way he had come, the Kid made, for minutes, for blocks, on, on, on!

The yellow dog loped beside him with hung head. Quickly there spread upon the western sky a great red blush where had sunk, behind the trees, the Indian Summer sun. A golden haze was falling upon the road like the chaff from unseen fairy mills, and long shadows were walking out from trees and bushes.

The sunset saddened the Frisco Kid. He felt heavy with a vast dread, heartsick, weary beyond telling. Yet he had something under his left arm which must be brought, forthwith, to the Gouger. He was a blown-in-the-glass stiff. He must help the Gouger to a win. It was the law of his hobo caste.

A bit more, and the Frisco Kid panted up a rise from the top of which he could look down into the bowl of the open-air arena. There were a number of persons on the rise and they all were standing, as if suddenly they had been jacked afoot by some crucial happening within that arena. Breathing hard, his head throbbing and aching from the blood that was being pounded up there by his incessantly working feet, the Frisco Kid paused to look down.

Afar off, he could see the black crowd within the arena and, raised aloft in their center, two white midgets performing upon a platform. He could make out the Slugger standing close to the cringing white body of the Gouger, his arms flying in and out like the eccentric rods of an engine, his gloved fists speeding punch upon merciless punch into the Gouger's stomach. And it seemed to the Kid that all the while he had been running, all that while, machine-like, the Slugger had been standing close to the Gouger, repeatedly smashing punch upon unendurable punch into the Gouger's stomach.

The Gouger went down upon his knees. The Slugger walked around, very warily, a little way from the kneeling Gouger.

Then the Kid saw the Gouger up upon his quaking legs, his arms, thin with distance, held out gropingly like the feelers of a bug. He saw the Slugger leap forward, crash one fist into the Gouger's stomach. The Gouger's midriff caved in. The Slugger stepped back. The Gouger went down.

Once again the Gouger was down. But he was not still. His oddly-shaped head twisted under him; his white legs lifted; he somersaulted, heels over head! For an intolerable breath, he lay still. Then heels over head, again he rolled!

It was as if the organs, cramped and knotted in his battered stomach, were doubling him up with agony, rolling him over and over. It was as if he were some reptilian creature, dead to all appearances, yet showing, spasmodically, quiverings of dying life. It was hideous!

The Frisco Kid waited, unable to move, his breath coming wheezingly, his eyes spread with horror and with pity.

The Gouger's legs lifted a third time. They hung in the air, hung white and waveringly in the air, then fell back heavily. His arms went wide. And flat upon his face on the white flooring, the Gouger spilled out.

He tried to rise. His outspread arms flapped like the fins of a landed fish. But he could not rise. From without the corner of the roped enclosure, his seconds doused water on him. But he could not rise. Spread-eagled and white-bodied, he quivered upon the rosin-prickly canvas, while over him the pudgy hand of the referee tolled off the unhurried moments of grace.

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His white legs knotted up in a convulsion, then shot out straight. The agony was over for the Gouger. He was unconscious—at last, out!

The referee raised aloft the gloved right hand of the Slugger. The Slugger had won. Youth—youth resilient, with unused cells of strength ever awaiting the call of trial and stress—youth the inevitable, had won.

But the Frisco Kid did not realize that. He wanted to get away from the persons on the hill and the view of that terrible arena. He went on down the hill, impelled toward the arena by he knew not what, his tired legs dragging, his head hung penitently, the dog sniffing up at him as if dumbly sympathizing with him in his anguish.

"It's all our fault, Gay-Cat," he said to the yellow dog at his feet. "We lost the trunks on the Gouger, and he couldn't win without them lucky trunks. I's awful sorry, Gay-Cat. The Gouger, he won't ride on the cushions hisself no more, but batter the back doors and be a ornery hobo jes' like you and me. Gee, old-timer, we gotta see the Gouger once more. We's blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, we are, and we can't go back on him now."

CHAPTER IX

"IT'S MONEY, MONEY, MONEY, EVERYWHERE."
—*Old Song.*

THE ONLY sound, in the Gouger's dressing-quarters, was the fleshy slap of the seconds' hands as they massaged his aching limbs. They wiped his body dry of the water they had doused on him to bring him to consciousness; they rubbed him to a glow; they slapped shut the steaming pores of his skin with lotions of alcohol; they bathed the bruises on face and body with an antiseptic wash composed of a solution of carbolic acid and hot water. They said no word. Only Steve chewed his gum very rapidly, the click and snap of his incessantly works jaws sounding, now and then, audibly.

At times, bursts of unrestrained laughter would come through the interstices between the unplaned planks of one wall where, beyond, were the dressing-quarters of the Slugger. At these times, Steve and Bud would look at each other in a kind of fright, and then askance down at the Gouger. But for all that he was conscious, the Gouger lay stiff and unmoving, his eyes closed.

The misfit of a door complained on its hinges and in, out of the pressing, passing crowd, hustled Manager Briggs. The Gouger opened his eyes to look at him. He looked at the manager then as a dog might look at its master, dumbly pleading to be petted, yet fearful that instead of patting it might feel the weight of the hand of the master. The Gouger was the first to speak.

"Well," he said feebly, yet with a sort of peevish challenge in his voice, "I lasted the ten rounds fur yuh, Briggs."

"Thet yuh did, ol' boy," spoke up Bud quickly, as if welcoming the chance to speak and encourage. "Youse is all right, Gouger."

"Thirteen's an unlucky number ennyways," from Steve, as he bathed the bruise on the right cheek of the Gouger with the solution of carbolic acid. "He got yeh fer fair in thet thirteenth round. Yeh couldn't last anudder."

Briggs had failed to answer. But at these words of Steve, his large mouth bent in his habitual sneer.

"Couldn't last another? Well, if yuh'd only have lasted two more frames—through the fifteenth—I'd have doubled on muh money."

"Aw, Briggs, I did the best I could," pleaded the Gouger. "Didn't I bring home the ten-round money fur yuh?"

"I know, I know," snapped Briggs savagely. "Yuh did the best yuh could—I ain't sayin' no to that. But yer best wasn't good enough. Yer old, Gouger. Yuh can't go it no more. The pace got yuh as much as any of them blows of the Slugger."

Briggs shaped his remarks without a care for the feelings of the Gouger. He was without tact, worse than blunt, brutally unfeeling, barbarous.

"Looket," he expounded, "looket how the Slugger opened up, fightin' all the time, every minute, an' you coverin' up, backin' an' fillin'—an' yet the Slugger finished strong an' beat yuh to a pulp! Yer old, Gouger. The Slugger had yuh right from that fust flip-flop in the third round. Oh, yuh know the game, all right. The Slugger's a tin-eared boob, as yuh say. You got the science, all the tricks. But it won't do yuh no good. All the Kid McCoy tricks in the world won't do yuh no good. Yer old."

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A bitter light filled the two caverns that were the Gouger's deep-set eyes. He looked up at the unplaned ceiling. Very quietly, he asked—

"How much yuh win, Briggs?"

Briggs started and his left hand went toward the inside pocket of his coat. But instantly he thought better of the move. His hand dropped away and, his eyes drawn tight, he stared down at the Gouger as though attempting to ferret out what underlay the query.

The Gouger was looking up at the ceiling. Briggs opened his mouth to speak. At that moment, from the dressing quarters of the Slugger beyond, went up a discord of laughter. Briggs waited as if for a quietude in which he might be heard.

But ere the sounds of laughter had died away, the Gouger turned his head and gazed full at the manager.

"I'm askin' yuh, Briggs," he said almost testily. "Was it so much yuh've gotta hedge about it?"

"Oh, no!" returned Briggs hastily. "Yuh've got it sized wrong. It ain't so much I feel like boastin' about it, I'll tell yer."

"How much was it, Briggs?" and the Gouger exchanged a swift meaning glance with his two seconds.

Briggs did not miss the glance. He became almost apologetic.

"Aw, whadda yuh think? I'm not holdin' nuthin' back on yuh. I'll tell yuh how much I won. Only I gotta explain it." He hesitated. "Yuh see, I bet five hundred—no, yuh see, I bet a thousand dollars, on the short end of the bet, that yuh'd last fifteen rounds——"

"But the ten-round money, Briggs?" The Gouger sat up, never removing his eyes from the flush-faced manager. "What I'm askin' is what did yuh win on the ten rounds?"

Briggs's eyes fled, in a kind of consternation, from the Gouger to his seconds. Bud was watching him closely, the bottle of carbolic acid poised in his hand. Steve had left off chewing.

"Aw, jes' five thousand dollars," he snarled like a cornered lynx.

The Gouger nodded thoughtfully, as if making some notation in his mind.

"All right," he said. "Yuh won five thousand dollars on me."

"But that fifteen-round bet," Briggs hastened to add. "I bet a thousand dollars on yuh to last——"

"How much? One thousand bones? Aw, come off yer perch!"

"Well, it was somethin' like seven-hundred an' fifty, anyways," persisted Briggs, coloring cholerically.

"I thought yuh said it was five hundred."

"Five hundred?" repeated Briggs, as if shockingly surprised. He flourished one diamond-glinting hand. "Well, have it yer own way," he said with seeming magnanimity. "It was seven hundred an' fifty—— but that's all right. Call it five hundred. I'm no piker."

"Well," said the Gouger slowly, "yuh won five thousand dollars when I lasted out the ten frames. Outer thet five thousand, yuh had ter pay back five hundred sinkers 'cause I failed ter last fifteen rounds. Thet makes four thousand five hundred dollars yuh won. Ain't I right—eh, Briggs?"

Briggs did not answer. He kept looking at the Gouger very studiously.

"Say," he blurted out at last, "what yuh drivin' at, Gouger?"

"Jes' this."

The Gouger lifted himself on his hands until he sat on the end of the rub-down table, his legs dangling over the edge. He draped a towel across his middle.

"I didn't pike my bets, Briggs. I had a hunch I was goin' ter win." He looked around as if, on the sudden, he missed something. "I thought," he went on, "thet hobo kid an' his yeller hound-dawg was a-gonna bring me luck. I bet every cent I had. Even what I hadn't at the time—the loser's end of the purse. An' I didn't bet on lastin' ten er fifteen round; I didn't pike—I bet ter win. I lost. I'm broke.

Briggs's large mouth had curved into his habitual sneer at the mention of the Frisco Kid. At the Gouger's frank admission that he had no money, the sneer deepened witheringly.

"Oh," was all he said, "I got yuh. Yuh're broke."

His words showed little interest in the Gouger's unhappy state. They committed him neither to sympathy nor to charity. They were chosen with thought prepense. He realized that the Gouger had some idea in the back of his head; he felt that that idea had somehow to do with the money he had won on the fight; and he hoped, by his non-committal answer, to stave off any

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attempt at a loan upon the part of the Gouger.

"Yep, I'm broke," repeated the Gouger, nothing daunted, knowing his man. "Yuh hear, Briggs? I'm broke."

The words were forced from Briggs's mouth. He could not again reiterate what the Gouger had said. There was no other way.

"Well," he said with very ill grace, "whadda yuh want me to do?"

"Jes' this. Give me two hundred an' fifty dollars ter git along on. No, I'm not askin' yuh ter lend it ter me. I say give it ter me. You won yer money on me. I'm askin' yuh ter share with me in yer winnin's, ter give me a bit of 'em."

"But I didn't win the money on yuh. You didn't cop the fight. I won my money by placin' it—placin' it wise."

"Yuh turn me down then, huh?"

Briggs fidgeted with the pockets of his white vest.

"No, no, Gouger—not that. But I got a lot of expenses. I bet five hundred dollars on yuh to win——"

The Gouger was angry.

"Yuh didn't!" he snapped. "Yuh're a —— liar! Yuh never even hoped ter see me win. Aw, I know yuh, Briggs!"

The Gouger got to his feet. Briggs backed away, one hand out conciliatingly.

"Sit down, Gouger, sit down! Don't git sore, old man. Lemme explain it."

"Explain what? Ain't yer turnin' me down?"

Despite the vehement resentment in his words, the Gouger was very weak. His hammered stomach felt squeamish. As he stood up, his head reeled. He held with one hand to the edge of the rub-down table. His head continued to reel. He sank back upon the table.

"I bet five hundred dollars on yuh to win," insisted Briggs, "so that leaves me only four thousand dollars ahead of the game. An' then there's other incidentals. I gotta pay Hackett's all of a hundred dollars fer yer room an' board, an' the use of the gym."

The Gouger removed his hand from his head. His head had cleared, albeit he still felt dismayingly weak. He looked at the manager with a wan smile that had in it something of bitterness but a great deal more of scorn.

"Briggs," he said slowly, "I got yuh. Yuh turn me down. I knew yuh would, I knew yuh'd throw the skids under me, ef I lost this fight. I tole yuh so. But I didn't expect yuh'd do it so rotten. Yuh turn me down cold!"

The Gouger grasped the sides of the table with hands streaked by red welts where the tape had been wound. He grasped the sides of the table tightly, until the red welts turned white.

Briggs waited as a man waits during an earthquake, mute under the shock, hoping for it to pass, knowing naught else to do.

The Gouger spoke. And there was no longer any whine in his voice. There was only in his voice a great and just acidity.

"I'm all in. I've fought the fight of my life. An' yuh turn me down on a measly couple of hundred. All right, Briggs. But lemme tell yuh. Ef I only could stand on my pins, without my head goin' round an' my stomach comin' up—ef I only could stand, I'd git thet money!" menacingly. "I wouldn't ast fur it. Naw! I'd take it away from yuh—yuh big, bloated toad!"

Briggs backed toward the misfit door at this threatening turn to the conversation. The Gouger looked away from him, at his two seconds. As if with some malicious meaning, he said:

"Yep! Ef I was as fit as yuh two fellers, I'd git my money! I'd git my money, er I'd git him!"

Briggs's hand was on the knob of the door. The Gouger swung his eyes on him suddenly. He snapped:

"Briggs, ain't yuh gonna pay these boys fur trainin' me? Ain't yuh gonna pay them the hundred apiece yuh promised!"

"No!" bawled the manager, and he slammed the door behind him.

The two seconds started for the door after the manager. Steve had recommenced chewing, chewing very fast.

"Thet's it!" the Gouger spurred them on. "After him! Git yer money! Git him!"

The men slammed out.

CHAPTER X

"FOR NONE CAN TELL TO WHAT RED HELL
HIS SIGHTLESS SOUL MAY STRAY."
—*Ballad of Reading Gaol.*

THE Gouger was alone. There was the sound of running footfalls fainting away along the wooden flooring of the entrance; there was the bang of a closing

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door in the direction of the Slugger's room; and then, in the rude shed of a dressing quarter, there was no longer any sound.

He sat on the edge of the rub-down table, a towel draped across his thighs. He could feel the air breathing sharply through the interstices between the unplaned planks of the walls; yet there was in him not sufficient strength of desire to cause him to draw on his clothes. Only necessity and then bitterness, a kind of rancor, had upheld him in the wordy duel with Briggs.

Now his stomach was turned upside down; black spots chased themselves across the retina of his eyes; and his brain gyrated in his head, at times, like shaken kernels in a nut. His strength was sapped, his vitality low.

It is a law of nature that the thoughts engendered when the vitality of the body is low are invariably morose thoughts. The Gouger was thinking morosely.

He had been turned down cold. At this extremity, when he needed help most, Briggs had thrown the skids under him. He had refused him even a loan. And his seconds were gone. Whether they got the money from Briggs or not, he knew they would not return. Everybody had deserted him. Yes, everybody—even that hobo kid and his yellow hound-dog.

And he was old. The crowd so had said. Briggs so had said. That was the sorry part of this game of his. He had given the best years of his life, every hour, every minute of those years, to this game. The game had unfitted him for any other pursuit of bread and butter. Now it had spit him, old in vigor though young in years, out into the unknown to shift for himself. What could he do?

Only healthy bodies under a high pressure of vitality aspire to Olympus. Men in the Gouger's state, with viscera gone, nerves frayed, vitality ebbed and the supreme effort of their lives foiled, tread mentally a Cimmerian gloom, an Abaddonian blackness, and lift their hands to Heaven and question the why of it all.

Thus the Gouger. His body ached and was weary and cried for rest; and now his continuous tenor of morose thinking had led him into a slough of morbidity. He lacked education; he was without a philosophy; there was nothing in the back of his head to temporize the aloes and vinegar of his downfall. He was walking innumerable *cul-de-sacs*, short-sightedly stubbing his brains against the wall of the future. He was treading a Dædalian maze, in which there showed no light, in which he was lost—helplessly, hopelessly lost. He could see no end.

And the Gouger was brave. He was braver even than the run of men. He had fought all his life, arduously, against odds and handicaps, preterhumanly. Yet now he thought to quit. He thought to give up the fight—the fight against the future, the fight of life. He had lost hope, all heart in the future. The future and life itself held nothing for him. He thought to die.

Quickly in vivid flashes, through the morbidity of his brains, reeled a horrid procession of the different modes man takes to end that which God has given. He thought of Nigger Jim who, after losing the fight in Butte, had cut the last filament of life in his body by streaking a steel razor across the jugular of his neck.

But there was, in the idea, something instinctively abhorrent to the Gouger.

"Thet's all right fur niggers," he said, "though Jim was sure white—the whitest man I ever knowed. Pore Jim!"

He thought then of Spider Feeley who, marked through dissipation by a fatal disease, had killed himself, but the year before, with a steel-capped bullet spit from a shooting-iron in his own hand. The thought burst on him like a tremendous inspiration. He imagined himself doing the same. He could almost feel the fatness of the butt of the revolver, the chill of the muzzle rubbing against his temple, the tension of his finger pulling the trigger.

His head jerked away. His oddly-shaped head jerked away as if from the impact of a steel-capped bullet.

There was something terrifically dismaying to him even in the visualization of a bullet thudding against his head. He had been so brutally mauled, his brains had been so sickeningly upset by the many pitiless blows smashed against his vital organs and head, that he could not think, now, to withstand another blow. He dodged and shivered before the idea of a bullet hitting his head, breaking through his head, shattering and scattering his brains. He could not stand it. The shock as of a blow would be too great.

"No, no!" he cried in an unutterable

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dread. "I've bin beaten enough about the head—too much. I'm losin' my noive! I can't do it! I can't do it!"

In a species of desperate frenzy, he looked about him. There were other and easier ways of ending one's life than by shooting oneself with a pistol. There were ways by which one floated into death without effort, without shock, as on sable wings. And the Gouger was weary. He wanted to glide into sleep gently, and never wake up.

A peculiar and pungently tarry odor was breathing into the Gouger's nostrils. He perked his head suddenly like a pointer whiffing quail. It was the odor of the carbolic solution with which his bruises had been bathed. There was a small quantity in a graniteware dish on the floor. There was fully a pint of unadulterated carbolic acid in a large thirty-two-ounce bottle that stood in the medicine-chest hanging on one wall.

Here was the way! It was no easy way, no blissful method of euthanasia. The acid would scorch his throat like undiluted alcohol; it would burn the lining of his stomach; it would terrifically sear him. It might cause him to retch and vomit, and be knotted up in convulsions. But he felt that he was so weak he would quickly collapse, and he knew that it would kill him in the end as certainly as a pistol shot and with no shocking, shattering, rending blow. He had been too much beaten.

His head reeling and a great ringing in his ears, as if already he had swallowed the acid, he slipped down upon his feet. Then toward the bottle that was gruesomely labeled with a skull and cross-bones, and a large warning, "Poison," he staggered.

CHAPTER XI

"ME AND GAY-CAT AND YOU!"

THE misfit of a door swung inward and the Frisco Kid entered. He was very weary. He had been buffeted by the outpouring crowd like driftwood on a wave. He had been darting between and around the shrieking automobiles that were leaving the arena, freighted with human cargo. The lashes of his deep-sunk eyes were laden with dust, his mouth was open for breath, and his brown face was a dusty white from the exertions he had undergone.

The Gouger staggered back and slumped down upon the rub-down table and shivered as if the freezing draft of air that accompanied the Kid's entrance had chilled him awake out of a bad dream. He brushed one hand before his eyes. The Kid still was there. He kept looking at the Kid in mute and stupefied bewilderment.

The Frisco Kid was in the throes of remorse and penitence. He could say no word. He could only stare at the Gouger with anxious, pleading blue eyes.

And then, as if to relieve the intolerableness of the situation, the door behind the Kid opened a crack, a mere trifle, and in squeezed the yellow dog, Gay-Cat.

The Gouger shrugged himself together. Then these figures before him were indeed real and not visitants from God as his superstitious mind had first told him. Slowly, at sight of the dog, a stiff smile worked itself up his face.

"Hullo," he said. "Where yuh bin, Kid? Where yuh bin, you an' yer dawg?"

The Frisco Kid, in his poignant consciousness of guilt, felt the Gouger's greeting as if it were an accusation.

"Aw, Gouger; aw, say now, Gouger. I didn't go back on yer. I didn't slope. I didn't quit yer like a termater-can bum. Gay-Cat and me, we's blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, and we left yer 'cause we thought we knowed a way to help yer.

"We saw the knockout, Gay-Cat and me, and we's awful sorry, Gouger. But mebbe if yer could 'a' stalled longer, mebbe then we'd 'a' been in time. We ran all the way, like everythin', Gouger. But we was too late. And I'm awful sorry, Gouger—Gay-Cat is sorry, too. But—but here it is!"

The Kid drew from under his left arm and held out before the Gouger's startled eyes the remnant of a pair of faded-green fighting-trunks.

The Gouger had listened to the Kid's gasping utterance in a bewilderment that was not unmixed with guilty qualms lest the Kid had observed that which he had been just about to do. But now, as the Kid held up the dirty and hopelessly torn fighting-trunks and questioned and entreated him from gipsy-blue eyes, the Gouger understood all at once, and smiled sadly and indulgently.

"Yep, I think yuh is a bit too late, Kid. But where—where did yuh git 'em? Is thet why yuh left me?"

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The Frisco Kid nodded hastily and almost happily at being so readily understood.

"I ran all the way back to Hackett's for 'em. I heard Briggs tellin' yer to stall in the seventh round, and I knew then yer couldn't win. But I thought if yer could only stall till I got back with the trunks, mebbe then yer could win, anyhow. I knew them trunks was som'eres about Hackett's, though I hadn't been able to find 'em that time Briggs went back with me. But Gay-Cat here—" and he looked in a kind of pride and thankfulness down at the yellow dog at his feet—"he promised to help out, and I jes' knowed he'd find 'em."

The Gouger was arousing to a definable interest in what the Kid was saying.

"How'd yuh know thet, Kid? How'd yuh know them trunks 'ud be about Hackett's?"

The Frisco Kid hesitated. His face went red and white by turns. He felt inexpressibly guilty and contrite.

"Well, yer see, Gouger," he stumbled, suddenly determined to tell all, "yer see, I lost my pants yeste'day when I was in swimmin'. I was in swimmin' right behind the gym. And I see'd yer trunks hangin' on the line—though I never knowed they was yers—and I pulled 'em down and got into 'em. And then I found my pants under Hackett's porch, wrapped about a pile, and I took off the trunks to get into them pants. But I never knowed where the trunks had gone to when yer asked about 'em—sure I never, Gouger. Gay-Cat here, he had buried 'em and he only brought 'em out when I went back the second time. It's all our fault, Gouger. We ran all the way back, but we was too late. And I guess yer sore at us, huh, Gouger? We's awful sorry. But mebbe if yer wear them trunks in yer next fight, mebbe then yer'll win, one hand!"

Slowly the Gouger shook his oddly-shaped head.

"There ain't gonna be enny next fight, Kid. Oh, I'm not sore at yuh, bo. Yuh're the only one what tried ter help me. Briggs turned me down cold, an' Bud an' Steve has run out on me. But yuh—yuh can't help me, Kid. I'm up aginst too tough a proposition. I'm old, Kid. I can't go the gait enny more. I'm through."

The fighting-trunks fell from the Kid's hand in the shock of a complete and ecstatic surprise. The dog at his feet pounced upon the fallen trunks as a cat might pounce upon a ball. But the Kid did not know that. His face was beaming with uncontainable joy.

"Then yer comin' along with us, with Gay-Cat an' me! I knowed yer would, Gouger, I jes' knowed yer would! And we'll be blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, me and Gay-Cat and you. We'll tramp along the roads and talk and whistle, and sleep under the trees and stars, and in haystacks sometimes, and ride the rods, and batter the screen doors and—and—oh, everythin'! We'll be buddies together, huh, Gouger?"

But the Gouger only shook his head.

"I'm too old, Kid. Yuh couldn't learn me ter be a stiff. I'd blow up on it, jes' like I done on this fight. I'm too old."

The Frisco Kid was astonished.

"You blow up? You too old? Aw, Gouger; aw, say now, Gouger! Yer'd be a blowed-in-the-glass in a week. I'll show yer all, Gouger. And a fighter like yer—why yer'll be king of the hoboes in no time!"

The Gouger could not refrain from smiling wanly at the Frisco Kid's confidence, his sublime hopes, and his glorified vision of the future. Yet, at the same time, it could not escape him how intrepidly brave was the Kid's outlook; and, as is always true of bravery, there was, in the Kid's suggestions, something so wholesomely infectious and tremendously stimulating that the Gouger felt himself lifted completely out of his morbidity.

He realized the change in him. He could feel that change refreshing him as a good night's sleep refreshes a wearied body. He felt renewed. He was no longer debilitated of body, depressed of spirit, desirous of dying. He wanted to live. He did not feel strongly the urge to live. It was merely that the hankering for death had lessened consciously its fell insistence. No longer did he want to die.

"Kid," he said very seriously, his soul on the ascendant, "yuh've learned me a mighty big lesson. Here yuh are, without a thing ahead er behind yuh, an' yet ye're willin' ter take a chance—ye're jes' foamin' over with pep an' gameness. Yuh make me feel measly, honest yuh do. Thet's why I've changed my mind. Thet's why I ain't gonna do what I was a-gonna do. I've changed my mind. I'm gonna be game, I am, an' see it through."

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The Gouger had changed his mind! Bewilderment fled the Kid's face, and his heart plumbed to his track-worn shoes. The Gouger had told him that, should he lose this fight, he would probably have to go on the road himself. And the Kid had thought to accompany the Gouger. But now the Gouger had changed his mind. He would not go on the road; he would not be the Kid's buddie! The Frisco Kid's thin face became, on the instant, pathetically rueful.

The Gouger noted the change, but misjudged the reason for it.

"Aw, no!" he hastened to add. "Don't be skeered, Kid. I tell yuh, I won't drink the stuff!"

The Gouger looked up at the medicine-chest, above his head on the wall, and full at the gruesomely labeled bottle of carbolic acid. The Frisco Kid did not know what to think, then. His eyes, very wide, ran over the array of bottles in the chest in a puzzled endeavor to discover the particular one the Gouger meant.

"Which, Gouger? What is it?"

"Don't yuh know?" The Gouger's deep-set eyes searched the deep-sunk eyes of the Kid. "Didn't yuh see me reachin' fur it when yuh came in?"

"I didn't notice. Is it skee?"

"Skee?" gasped the Gouger, the force of his surprise allowing him nothing to say save a repetition of the Kid's word. His face was stupid with blankness. Then, in an eyewink, an indivisible trice, his face grew bright, his eyes all a-twitter, with the agitation of a sublime and fortunate thought.

"Thet's it, thet's it!" he said, very fast, as if unable to mouth the words quickly enough. "It's old man Red-Eye! I was goin' ter swaller it ter bluff out my defeat. I needed somethin', Kid. I felt awful rotten jes' afore yuh came in. Briggs turned me down, an' Bud an' Steve sloped on me. They all turned me down cold. Only you came back, kid—you an' yer hound-dawg!"

"Aw, Gouger; aw, say now, Gouger! We wouldn't run out on yer. Yer was good to us, Gouger, and we couldn't go back on yer nohow. We'se blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, Gay-Cat and me, and we stick by our friends."

There was the sound of footsteps approaching along the wooden flooring of the entrance. As if fearing that some one might intrude, the Kid added hastily, yearningly:

"And yer is comin' with us now, sure, Gouger? Me, I allus wanted to go back into the great hobo country t'other side of the Hump, but I was kinder leary since I left Frisco Red. But now I won't be leary of crossin' the Sierras no more. Me and you, we'll ride together through the snowshed, Gouger, and yer can button old Gay-Cat inside yer coat to keep yer warm. Gee, it'll be swell—me and Gay-Cat and you!"

The Frisco Kid looked at the prize-fighter and there was, in his gipsy-blue eyes, admiration and ardent longing. The Gouger was very thoughtful.

"I've half a mind," he began; but at that moment, when he was within an ace of making a decision, the misfit of a door swung inward and, in an utter and overpowering astonishment, the rest of his words were sucked down his throat.

Standing in the doorway was the squat, broad-shouldered form of Slugger Sweigert, his face beaming between criss-crossings of court-plaster, a soft black four-dented hat pushed back upon his head, a tight double-breasted suit accentuating the breadth of his chest, a gold-headed cane held lightly in one chamois-gloved hand, and a necktie showing a violent streak of red between the choking lapels of his blue coat.

CHAPTER XII

INTO THE DARKLING NIGHT

THE Slugger radiated good nature and action from his criss-crossed, beaming and battered countenance and violent red necktie down to the shimmering square toes of his patent leathers. He did not wait for the Gouger to recover from his astonishment. He could not contain himself. He plunged right in on that business which had brought him.

"Hit's a dirty stinkin' shyme, th' w'y Briggs polished yuh off," he said heatedly with nasal and aspirated accent. "Hi wuz in my dressin'-hapartment next door, y' know, so yuh cawn't bli' me fer hover-'earin' a bit. But wot Hi mean to s'y his that that wuzn't wot brung me 'ere. Hi sez t' myself, sez Hi, 'This chap's a bleedin' beggar, a blawsted down-pin, an' hit's a bloody shyme. 'E knows th' gyme, 'e does though really, y' know, 'e is a bit ole.

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"'Now, 'ere, Mr. Featherstonehaugh,' I sez t' my manager, sez I, 'ere y' are goin' back t' Austrylia, next wyck. Hi need a manager, but no bally rotter, y' know. An' 'ere's this chap, Gouger, a down-pin, Lawd lumme, but a chap wot knows th' gyme. 'E won't fight henny more; 'e's a bit ole fer th' gyme; but Hi'm blessed, Mr. Featherstonehaugh,' Hi sez, sez Hi, 'Hi fawncy to 'ave 'im teach me th' gyme, be my manager—that sort of thing. 'E thinks Hi am a—haw, wot d' ye call it, suh?—'e thinks Hi've got a storage utensil hover my ears. Blimey, 'e's right. So wot s'y? Wot s'y to 'ave 'im teach me th' gyme, all 'e knows?'

"'Yuh're balmy,' sez 'e, 'but go a'ead,' sez 'e. An' 'ere, like a silly ass, Hi am. But really, ole fellah, Hi want yuh t' come along with me. Eh? Wot s'y?"

As the Australian spoke, the Gouger recovered more and more from his astonishment. His puffed and broken lips drew into a whimsical smile. Yet there was in the smile something less superficial than any whimsey, something indescribably deeper—as if, indeed, the motive that actuated the man's oddly-accented words had touched soothingly the very wounds of his soul.

He knew now. This was not the Slugger who had called him names. This was the victor, the generous victor. Yet he feared that the Slugger was more than the generous victor. He feared the charitable victor. And he who had been within a wink of death, did not yet hold life so dear as to be bought at the price of dishonor. He dreaded lest the Slugger was proffering to him some form of charity.

"This ain't salve, is it, Slugger?" he asked probingly. "Yuh think I kin learn yuh somethin'—yuh think so, on the level?"

"Somethin'?" In unfeigned surprise, the Slugger exerted the superciliary muscles so that the court-plaster bunched on his lifted eyebrows. "Well, really, matey, yuh cawn teach me everythin' habout th' gyme! Lawd lumme, Hi felt wot yuh knew when Hi wuz sparrin' yuh. Oh, Hi could tell. Hi felt like a silly ass, blimey! Hi've bin only a twelve-month in this gyme, y' know, an' they tell me yuh've bin in hit fer eleven years. 'Ere, tyke this, come along with me, an' we'll call hit a tryde." He offered to the Gouger a sheaf of greenbacks.

The Gouger looked from the man to the money, from the money to the man; and, weak as he still was, he could not help it—at this unexpected and unstinted generosity, his eyes filled. He swallowed once or twice in an attempt to speak. But he could not speak. He put out his hand and grasped the unencumbered hand of the Slugger. Holding onto the Slugger's hand, dumbly thus he expressed his appreciation and his thanks.

The Frisco Kid watched in a fine admiration. He was markedly susceptible to sympathy and generosity, not alone because of his youth, but also because of his hard-earned knowledge of the inhospitality of the world.

"Gee!" he muttered. "The Slugger's a blowed-in-the-glass, too! They's both blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, the Gouger and the Slugger!"

"'Ere, tyke it," repeated the Slugger, affecting impatience. "Don't myke a bloomin' scene, ole chap. This bit, why hit's only yer first wyck's wyges. Tyke hit, matey, an' come along."

The Gouger took the money without daring to utter a word, then turned away hastily and donned his undergarments, trousers, shirt, shoes and coat.

The Frisco Kid waited, the dog worrying the faded-green fighting-trunks at his feet. As the Gouger went out, followed by the Slugger, the Kid accepted the chance offered by their turned backs and picked up, from between the dog's paws, the pair of dirty and hopelessly torn fighting-trunks.

AS THE Frisco Kid emerged, with his dog, from the entrance to the arena, the Gouger seemed suddenly to awake to his presence. A sheepish expression laid itself on his battered countenance. He stepped down from the footboard of the Slugger's automobile and, approaching, tendered to the Kid one of the greenbacks the Slugger had just given him. It was as if he wished to propitiate the Kid for his change of heart, to atone somehow for the loss of himself as the Kid's buddie.

"Remember, I promised yuh a slice of the purse, Kid?" he said, with a sorry attempt at a smile. "Well, here it is."

"But yer didn't win. And I wasn't to share unless yer won. No, Gouger; I can't take it."

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There was, in the Kid's deep-sunk eyes, a woful wistfulness. The Gouger saw the look; he understood; and quickly he turned away, his hand crushing the greenback into a ball under the stress of some strong emotion. Finally he swung about again and laid one red-welted hand upon the Kid's frail shoulder.

"Kid," he said, "I'd like ter go along with yuh; I'd like ter go like everythin'. But I can't, kid. It 'ud be a dirty trick on the Slugger here. He believes in me. He believes I kin give him some pointers on the game. An' I gotta live up ter his opinion. I gotta show him all I knows. I gotta make him a champeen!

"Yuh see how it is, Kid. I've bin in this game fur eleven year—eleven hard, long, fightin' year. I know it from A to Israel. It's all I do know. An' I can't slope, I can't run out on the game. I gotta stick ter it, an' show the Slugger what I knows, an' pay back through him all thet the game learned me. If I threw the skids under the game an' sloped with yuh, I'd queer the Slugger, an', Kid, he's a friend of mine now. I don't wanta do thet. I wanta stick ter my friends like—whadda yuh call it?"

"A blowed-in-the-glass stiff, Gouger?" faltered the Kid.

"Thet's it—a blowed-in-the-glass stiff, Kid. A guy what sticks ter his friends; a guy what tries ter help his friends fur helpin' him; a guy what never quits his game. Thet's what I wanta be, kid—a blowed-in-the-glass stiff!"

"And yer is, Gouger! You and the Slugger, yer both blowed-in-the-glass stiffs!"

In the vocabulary of the Frisco Kid's hobo caste that was the finest compliment one could pay a man. The Kid, as he uttered it, held the remnant of fighting-trunks out to the Gouger.

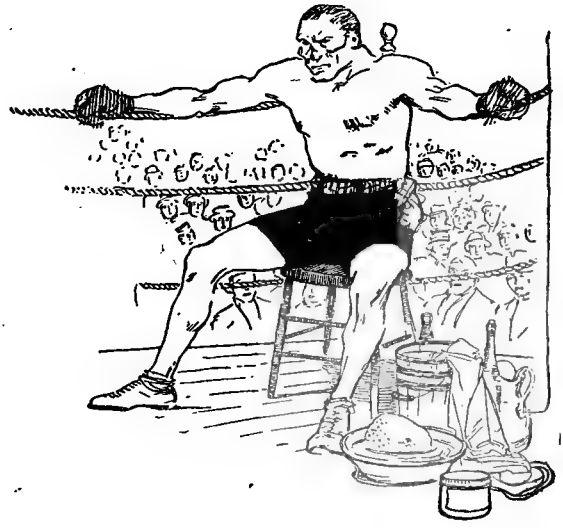
"Yer don't need 'em now, Gouger," he said. "But if yer'll give 'em to the Slugger in his next fight—if the Slugger'll only wear 'em, Gouger, mebbe then he'll win for yer, one hand!"

The Gouger crushed the trunks in his hands as once before, under the stress of strong emotion, he had crushed the greenback. He started to say something; his throat-apple moved up and down convulsively; but he could not speak. He tore his eyes away from the Kid and leaped in a kind of flurry into the automobile.

The Slugger, waiting and ready, slowly released the clutch. The automobile rolled away.

The Frisco Kid looked after the dust-raising car; the wistfulness turned moist in his eyes. The car disappeared into the darkling night. And the Kid felt then, all at once, inexpressibly lonely.

"Gee," he gulped to the yellow mongrel at his feet, "I didn't want the money. I wanted Gouger—along—as buddies!"



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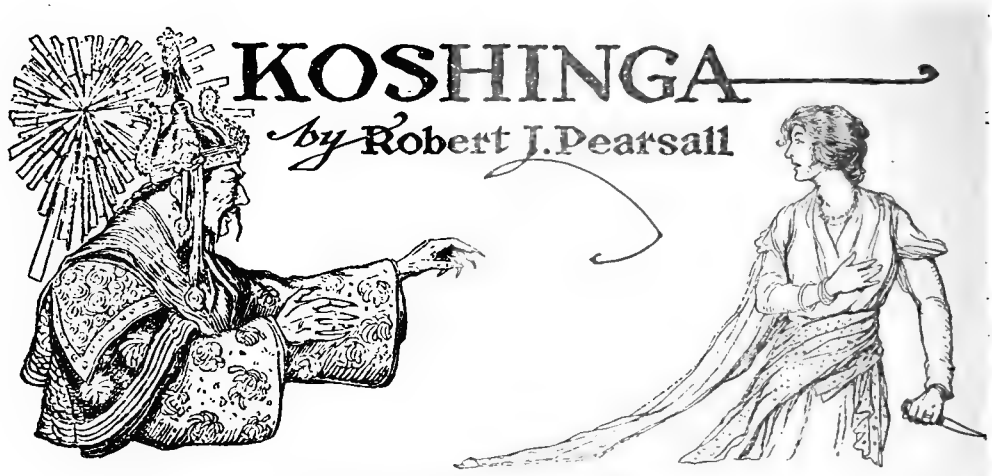

KOSHINGA

by Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "The Light of Tambaron," "Yellow," etc.

From the murk of elder years,
  Spawned of evil, bred in gloom,
Soulless shape of dread appears,
  Threats this Western world with ruin. . . .
While still in wait the monster lurks,
Swift and sure God's judgment works.
—*R. J. P.*

I DRINK, yes, gentlemen, but I am not drunk, nor do I think I can ever get drunk again. And this that I tell you is the truth. I was Koshinga's right-hand man, and I might have been vice-gerent of the earth, and what I know I know. Since the world began, there was never such a man as Koshinga, nor such a story as the story you shall hear. The pay I shall get for telling you it is hate, which is maybe the pay I desire.

There were the first Koshinga, and the fourteen of his line, and the last. The first was lord of the sea only—of the China Sea and its coast—and when the Manchus came down from the north they did for him. But the last was rightfully lord of the earth, and was fashioned therefor. Also he was the fulfilment of a prophecy, and he was himself a prophecy, as was intended from the beginning.

This was the way of it:

The first Koshinga hid himself. That was three hundred years ago, when the Manchus took China, and the Manchus thought he died. But he hid himself in the cave of He Who Rules, and his followers—they were the Ko Lao Hui, pirates—beached their junks and came ashore.

Koshinga brought a Dutch girl with him from Formosa, and he started then his grand plan of overthrowing the Manchus first, and all other nations afterward. And it would have worked—it would have swept over the world like a yellow cloud!

You see, Koshinga the First knew how to wait, how to look ahead and wait till his own bones had crumbled. These Asiatics all do. Asia is waiting now, you bet, and all she needs is a leader. But it will be a long time before she gets another Koshinga the Last. Fifteen generations it took to make him. And he and everything else went to the devil in the flash of a firebrand—except me.

The place where the first Koshinga hid himself wasn't a hundred miles from Pekin. No one knew about the cave, though, but some coolies; and their mouths were shut for them for all time.

It was in the middle of the Khingan Mountains, and there were two entrances, but only one we could use. The other was a great opening about twenty feet across at the top, and it opened on top of a mountain so steep and rocky that I don't think anybody ever climbed it. That was how we got air and daylight. But most of the place was lighted with gas. They got plenty of that by boring for it.

The way we got in and out was through a passage which opened into a narrow gorge. The passage had a door of solid rock that you'd never know was there. There was a stone button you pressed that opened it. Then you went down some stone steps and poled a flat-bottomed boat across an underground lake, and you rapped the sign of the Ko Lao Hui on another door. If you didn't get the sign right, you died where you stood.

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When Koshinga the First went there, there was only one chamber to the cave, the big central chamber where all the Koshingas gave audiences. But some time during the centuries they had coolies in there, and they dug and hewed out passages and cells and store rooms, and sleeping rooms. There was luxury in that cave—such luxury as the western world knows nothing of—but there was discipline, too, and work of the hardest.

This was Koshinga's plan, that I started to tell you about: He would turn the Ko Lao Hui into a revolutionary society, a secret patriotic *tong* of the conquered Chinese. And he would build the foundations of that society so solidly, he would plan its constitution so wisely—both with an ear attuned to all the frailities and egotisms of the human race—that it would finally become more powerful than any order or kingship that ever was.

Henceforth the Ko Lao Hui were to recognize but one law, which was the word of Koshinga, one crime, which was disobedience to that word, and one punishment, death. The leadership of the society was to be hereditary. And Koshinga the First set out to produce such a born leader, such a natural ruler of the whole human family, as the world had never seen before.

Such a man as I served, a man in whose veins ran the blood of every race under the heavens. Such a man as this. Look at this engraving, gentlemen.

I do not blame you for your disbelief. The dagger is worn; it looks a century old; in truth, it is older than the Tartar Wall. Yet by all the gods of Cathay, I have seen in flesh the face engraved on its hilt. For this dagger is the sign of the Ko Lao Hui, and the face is the face of the last Koshinga as prophesied by the first. A prophecy which came true in every feature and line.

It was made to come true. Mapped out in advance, the Koshinga family tree was. Each successive Koshinga was to take to wife such a type of woman from such a race or mixture of races as the first Koshinga ordered. Stolen away the women were, all of them. Carried off, taken to the cave; they never saw the open earth again.

The first born son of each became the succeeding Koshinga. Other children were put out, before they could know their parentage, into the ranks of the Ko Lao Hui—They Who Obey. But the Koshingas themselves never came out of that cave. For three centuries Koshinga was but a name to be worshipped and a voice to be feared. For of course the manner of the fulfilment of the prophecy must be kept secret.

That is, it must be kept secret from the mass. There was an inner circle who knew, of course. The twenty Lesser Rulers knew. I was one of them at the last.

But had all known, it would still have seemed almost a miracle. The first Koshinga must have understood the laws of heredity mighty well. Or maybe the fact that everywhere on the walls of the home of He Who Ruled—on tapestry, on armor, in wood carving—this face was pictured, had more to do with it. To fourteen generations of Koshingas it was an ideal—an ideal prophetic of the day which will yet come, when all the earth will be one nation and one blood. The fifteenth generation attained that ideal.

It is a hideous, a sinister, a bestial face—Koshinga would thank you for saying that. Deracialized brutality; that is also good. Power! Power without scruples, without pity, without any weakness whatsover, was what the Koshingas bred for. Strength that would crush down opposition as a thresher flails a straw. Egotism that would know no will but his own. Desire that all the world could not satisfy. A body—Koshinga was a giant. With one blow he could crush *your* skull like an eggshell. I tell you, he was a superman, and there is nothing in this world that could have stood against him.

And I was no weakling. You shall never know who I was. *That* man died when I joined the Ko Lao Hui. But his knowledge did not die. Further into those arts of slaughter wherewith the western world destroys itself today, like a mad serpent stinging itself in the dark, had I gone than any other man.

Because of that, and because the stage was nearly set and the time ripe for the appearance of Koshinga, the Lesser Rulers sought me out. Because their price was the highest offered, I went to them. Only a fool would have done otherwise. The enlightened man is an individual, and Self is his only god. I served that god, and still serve it. Only, of late I must drink.

Koshinga was a strong man, and I was a strong man, and the Ko Lao Hui numbered

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ten million. And all Asia would have followed us, and all the world in time submitted to us, for Koshinga was likewise a symbol. A symbol of world dominion he was, the World Man so long foretold, and no race could claim him, and no race deny him.

Oh, the thing was planned; in every country we had our agents; the working of the machine was inscrutable but it was perfect; our power was as yet a subtle and intangible power, but its potentialities were already throne-shaking. We would have won, and Koshinga would have ruled the world, and his followers would have ruled the world, and those that were strongest among us would have ruled the most. And I know what you think, but this that I say is true.

Tell me, how were the Manchus overcome? Whence came the mad, Empire-wide convulsions that toppled them from their throne? In its mere death struggles, its writhing, as a decapitated serpent writhes, the Ko Lao Hui had strength enough to accomplish its first purpose. But that was all. The very thought of world conquest was lost. Why? Because of a holocaust, gentlemen. Because of the mistake of the first Koshinga, who planned all other things so well, but erred in giving the last Koshinga a wife.

THE Chinese do not regard a man as a complete man until he has begotten a son. Also, it was well that the line of Koshingas should not die out. Still it was a mistake.

Women are devils, especially when they are in love. They clutter things up. They will throw away the queenship of the world for the empty bubbles of honor and loyalty. Yes, and they will throw their lives into the balance, and smile when they strike hands with Death.

She was an American girl. She was very beautiful, and her womanhood had been awakened by love. Clear, strong eyes she had of the color of deep water, and she held herself erect.

Her name was Vera Gray, and she was the daughter of a Tatung missionary. Her house coolies were members of the Ko Lao Hui, and one of the inner council became her ricksha man.

One day he took her to where a Peking cart was waiting, and she was bound and gagged and carried a three-day journey over the old mountain road through black defiles and gorges, and finally to the cave and to Koshinga.

But the fools brought another prisoner, too, and one who was not wanted. It was John Selenger, the woman's lover, whom she was to marry.

No one will ever know how he discovered the way she had been taken. But he came after that Peking cart like a demon-driven madman—a trail of spent donkeys behind him. He caught the cart in mid journey. Spurred by his love, no doubt, carried out of himself by that senseless passion I cannot understand, he attacked the four guardians of the cart empty-handed. He was overcome; but before he was overcome he reached the woman for one moment, tearing aside the flaps of the canvas cover wherein she lay. They dragged him away, but he had had time enough to accomplish his purpose, to pass her a keen-edged dagger.

Selenger was a missionary. He was a pale-faced, slender man, of no bravery. He was not a man I should have feared, and I know men. But I do not know lovers.

Because it was easier to carry him living than dead, and they did not wish to bury him by the way, they brought him to Koshinga. I was in the central chamber when they brought them in—the man and the woman—and stood them before Koshinga's throne. I saw Koshinga's great face quiver and flush, his small eyes glitter, his full lips curve desirously, and I thought that they who had chosen his bride had done well. Then I looked at the woman and thought differently.

Her face was as white and motionless as the face of a wax figure, and she stared at Koshinga with hate-filled and defiant eyes. Selenger, too, was defiant—about them both was an air almost of triumph at which I wondered, for they seemed to me as helpless as motes caught in the wheels of the world. But the secret of their strength was this, that against Vera Gray's breast lay a cold steel blade.

Though Koshinga spoke English as he did all modern languages, he deputed me to tell the woman the story of the glory she was to share. I told it as I have told you, but with more conviction, for then I spoke of things that were to happen. But while I talked something in her face told me that one thing that had been planned would

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never happen, that she would never be wife of Koshinga.

But Koshinga did not know women. He descended from his seat and came toward her, his silk robe rustling. Between the two rows of bowing Lesser Rulers he came, his face flushed, his fingers twitching, the throes of a great desire convulsing him.

Vera Gray watched him come, and, when he was still six paces away, her right hand darted into the bosom of her dress. It came out grasping the hilt of a knife. But the point of that knife remained inside her gown, pressed to her heart like a thing beloved.

She spoke just one word.

"Stop!"

Never before had Koshinga known a wish denied, never before had he endured a command. He wavered; his eyes filled with a sort of surprise; and then he came on again.

Vera Gray pressed the dagger in. She held it so it would slip between the ribs. A red stain appeared on the front of her dress and widened circularly around the blade.

She drove the knife deeper with a steady pressure. She looked straight into Koshinga's dilating eyes, and her look said plainly that if he reached her he would embrace a dying woman.

Koshinga stopped. I do not know whether fear, anger, or amazement was strongest in him. One thing I marked with joy, that there was no softness, no compassion. As I have said, the man who is to rule men has no place for these luxuries of feeling. It was a test such as I had wanted to see.

"What—" he began. "What——"

He was not to be blamed for incoherence of feeling. He was being flooded with emotions of a kind he had never felt before.

"She has disobeyed Koshinga," I said. "She must die. They both must die." And there came an assenting murmur from the others of the Twenty.

"I will die before you touch me," said Vera Gray steadily. "The women of my race do not marry strangers. You must give me time."

Now therein did Vera Gray show the cunning of women which is as the cunning of the devil, and therein was I wiser than Koshinga. For I could read her face, and I saw that a hundred years could not bring her to endure his touch. But she played for time, hoping to save her life and the life of the man she loved, and in some way to escape from that place which must have been to her so terrible.

And yet she had but to yield, and, yielding, she could have ruled it. Through Koshinga she could have ruled us all and ruled the world. For Koshinga was but a man.

"Time!" he repeated after her reluctantly.

The knife came our from her breast a bit, and she smiled. Smiled, that daughter of Eve did; her stony face melted into a miracle of beauty, her lips parted and curved, her eyes grew warm.

"A month, Koshinga," she said softly. "Give me a month to get ready for this thing. I have heard how great you are, and I am satisfied. I will marry you according to what custom you choose, in a month."

"Too long!" cried Koshinga, the hot blood rushing into his face.

But, as he started forward, the knife bit its way into her breast again.

"Then or never," said Vera Gray.

I spoke again, for I saw that the woman was more dangerous than loosed melinite.

"Other wives may be procured," said I, "but the word of Koshinga must never be disobeyed. The punishment is death." Again the Lesser Rulers agreed with me.

But what is the wisdom of a man against the beauty of a woman? Desire rode Koshinga's will like a brainless hag. He yielded to her in all things. Not only was her life to be spared, but the life of her lover, whom she falsely claimed was her brother.

She kept her dagger. A sleeping-room was furnished her, double-barred on the inside. And whenever she was out of that room, no man must approach her closer than six paces.

It was bad business. Koshinga's will had been crossed and thereby weakened; his sense of omnipotence was lessened; he was by so much a less perfect leader. John Selenger went meekly to his stone-walled cell, and Vera Gray walked free, her head high, her eyes fearless, the print of the dagger showing in the looseness of her gown.

It was she that I feared. John Selenger I did not consider at all. His fate was fixed for him. His death was simply delayed. Meanwhile he was safe. No man had ever escaped from the damp, black cell in which

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he lay. And he, I thought, was a weakling.

He *was* a weakling, I believe. But he must have understood the power of mind. He must have known, as I know, that a man can think himself out of anything. Anything material, that is to say. Mind is master of matter and of the laws of matter. Mind can summon both to work against themselves. As he did.

I imagined him supinely helpless, and I forgot him in my work. My work was everything to me in those days. How successful I was I could not make you imagine.

I had achieved more than any other man had ever dared to dream in the art of mechanical slaughter. A relay gun wherewith I could have hurled a projectile to Pekin, a blinding compound each shell of which had an effective radius of half a mile, an aerial cruiser that was to the clumsy devices of Europe as a battleship is to a scow—these were only three of my inventions. And still I lived in a perpetual heaven of new conceptions, an ecstasy of continual achievement.

Ah, mine was the only work worth while. There is no gift so high as the genius for destruction. Commonplace in comparison is the creation of life—an atomic function. Only the gods destroy by wholesale—they, and the men that dare to rival them.

I was such a man then. Now there is something wrong with me. I think, but I can not execute. The doom of futility is on me. The doom of the commonplace, the mockery of the dead inertia of things. From the heights of achievement I am fallen to a depth lower than the herds.

The herds! It is they that I hate. The dull, stupid mass of men clinging forever to worn-out creeds, to petty, personal loyalties. It is they that balk us, us who are born with the world idea. For, mark you! They will sacrifice their lives for those exploded ideas of patriotism and honor and love. They will fling their lives into the wheels of the machine we build, and destroy themselves and it together.

And that is something I can never understand. What motive can there be for human actions save self-profit, and how can self profit by self-destruction?

How did John Selenger escape from his cell? I'll tell you. I know because I saw. In that last terrible hour, when the fate of all things hung on the falling sparks, I looked at the broken wall. Damp and crushed pulp of wood told me the story.

We had taken everything from Selenger but his brains, wherein was our mistake. And he had found a slab of wood in his cell, and a loose fragment of rock which could be sharpened, and water was passed in to him with his meals.

There must have been a crack in the inner wall of the cell. Into this crack, which may in the beginning have been no more than a finger's-breadth, he jammed wood tightly. Then he applied the water, little by little, the wood swelling in the process of absorption and widening the crack.

When, in the course of a day or so, the wood dried and shrunk again, the widened crevice still remained. More wood was put in, more water applied, and the process repeated. Fifty men could not have produced an equal pressure.

Gradually a section of the wall was forced outward. And beyond that wall, as blind fate would have it, lay the depository for the completed products of my laboratory, a chamber filled with stored-up and concentrated death.

Thus, while Koshinga followed Vera Gray with his eyes like a love-sick school-boy, and while Vera Gray's hand hovered ever near her protecting dagger, her missionary lover was slowly forcing his way into a position where he would command the lives of all of us. And all the time, to and from the home of He Who Ruled went secret trusted couriers; and up and down the Chinese Empire, from Tibet to Manchuria, from Turkestan to the coast, the imminence of the Coming One, the prophesied Koshinga, was being preached. Perhaps within a year, certainly within two years, he would come, and armed with such destructive tools as the world had never thought of.

By this time the whole Chinese race had heard the teaching. It was rapidly coalescing, gaining the consciousness of race solidarity, being molded into a world-smiting weapon ready for Koshinga's hand.

But over the house of Koshinga and the Ko Lao Hui there was creeping the shadow of death.

I lost track of time. I think about three weeks passed before the catastrophe. In another week Vera Gray must make her final choice. A gray shadow was creeping over her face, too; she was haggard and weary; but there was still no fear in her

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eyes. No fear and no yielding; I knew what she would do when the time came. But that time never came.

ONE morning I was working alone in my laboratory. I heard a sound like the distant thud of a falling rock, but paid no attention to it. Two minutes later there came a wrenching and pounding at my locked door. I opened it, and Tsai Ching, one of the Lesser Rulers, rushed in.

His breath was coming in gasps, his slant, black eyes were filled with a horrible fear, his voice was a hoarse shriek. His Oriental stolidity had been smashed quite out of him.

"The powder room! The powder room!" he cried.

There was suggestion of menace enough in those words to make my own heart leap. But in those days my nerves were steadier than they are now. I controlled myself, and only asked sharply—

"What?"

"It is death," he wailed. "The American is in the powder room. You have it—the key."

I wasted no time in talk nor conjecture. But, while I followed Tsai Ching through the central chamber and along the corridor to the door of the magazine, I, thought quickly and to reassuring purpose. No man could explode the magazine without killing himself. And, since all men cling to life, no man would be apt to do that—least of all John Selenger, the missionary.

As I approached the door, around which were clustered half a dozen members of the Inner Circle, I drew an automatic from my pocket and held it ready. I was glad to see the look of acknowledged leadership, welcomed with relief, that came over the faces of the Chinese when they saw me.

"What is it?" I asked, speaking confidently.

Now Chinese are phlegmatic; they have the courage of fatalism; and I have seen them walk to their deaths with less emotion than they would walk to a savory meal. But these men jabbered at me like overwrought school girls. It was no wonder. The calamity they had visioned was a greater calamity than the mere destruction of their own lives. That is, greater to them. I am an individualist, and I think in terms of the individual, which is I.

I gathered that an English-speaking man, probably the prisoner, was inside the magazine and demanding that the door be opened.

I do not believe in parleying. The only unanswerable argument is death. I inserted the key, flung the door back, and entered, my revolver leveled and ready.

My aim was instant and my finger pressed the trigger, and then released it. For there stood John Selenger, in his hand a burning brand some three feet long. Gentlemen, beneath that brand lay a train of powder, and it led to an opened and overturned cask. Back of that cask were other casks and boxes of potential destruction.

If Selenger were shot that brand would fall. The report of the revolver would never know an echo.

For a moment I admit my brain was palsied with terror. Then I remembered something. Long ago, in my careful regard for myself, I had provided for just such a contingency. Much coolie labor had it cost, but a way of escape was open to me under any circumstances.

I edged to the left a little. When I felt my left boot touch a secret spring, I recovered, all of a sudden, the sense I had so carefully cultivated of being master of every situation. I spoke so calmly that it surprised me:

"You are careless of your life, Selenger. This is no stage and no place for mock heroics. You have done well in escaping—" one glance, as I have said, had showed me the means he had used—"and in making fire. You are a man we of the Ko Lao Hui might use. But if one of those sparks falls on the powder, none of us will need burying. Put away that brand and we'll talk business."

"I'll talk business with the brute you call He Who Rules," said Selenger without stirring, "although *I* rule now. Send for him."

I hesitated, and Selenger snapped to one of the Chinese:

"Go for him. And if you're not back with him inside two minutes I'll drop this stick. If you think you can get far enough away in that time to save your skin, try it.'

Fifteen minutes would not have sufficed any one to escape the range of that bursting death, and Selenger knew it. You will know it, too, if you go look at that mountain in the bowels of which was once the home of He Who Rules. Around the crater-like hollow at its summit, the rent rocks lie in

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blasted fragments. The whole peak is erupted, broken outward, with the inferno of gaseous force that was suddenly loosed within it. For miles in every direction the surface of the earth is ruinous with the rain of heavy missiles spouted up from the exploding chambers of death.

No one could have evaded that wholesale destruction by running away from it. By sinking below it, through the solid rock, into the elastic earth—that was different.

While the Chinese was gone on his errand, I talked to Selenger. By pointing out the danger of a live spark falling on the powder, I tried to get him to shift the flaming stick, if only by a hand's-breadth. If he had done so, and if he had moved it as would have been natural, backward, I should have chanced a shot. The momentum of the bullet would have carried him still further backward, and the brand would have fallen clear of the powder train. Or it might have. I should have chanced the thing.

But instead he stood as motionless and silent as a stone image until Koshinga came.

Now, Koshinga had never known fear, nor had his ancestors for three hundred years. And so urgently had the sense of ultimate destiny been impressed on all of them—that the line could not die out until it had achieved the purpose for which it had been conceived, the mastery of the earth—that it had grown into a fanatic religious belief.

It is an illustration of how all the beliefs with which we fool ourselves pale before actuality that, at the sight of Selenger, the fire brand, and the spilled powder, his dominant face became twisted and livid with mortal terror. Peril from a bullet or a knife he might indeed have denied, but superstition had no bulwarks for his courage that could withstand the thought of flesh-rending high explosives.

But his instinct for authority survived the death of his courage. Or it may be that having commanded all his life he knew no other form of expression.

His words came in a bellowing roar, ordering Selenger back to his cell. But Selenger's quiet, controlled voice cut through his turbulence like a knife.

"I want everybody here. Everybody! Including the woman you stole. Send for them at once."

One of the Chinese, thinking Selenger wholly occupied with Koshinga, made a rush at him from the side. Selenger never looked at him, but Selenger's ears must have caught the sound of his first leap, for the fire brand descended swiftly. So near did it come to the heaped-up powder that a thin and desperate cry compounded of the voices of all present filled the room. But the Chinese halted himself with a mighty effort; and the downward swirl of the fire-brand halted likewise.

"Call your dog off, Koshinga," said Selenger, and Koshinga obeyed.

As the Chinese withdrew to his former position, the flaming stick ascended to the level of Selenger's waist.

Selenger's eyes never left Koshinga's. Koshinga's eyes finally wavered and fell, and he turned and gave the order that Selenger had dictated.

They came to the death-trap—such was the power of Koshinga over them! They came by twos and threes, slinking in fearfully. And nearly the last of all came Vera Gray, and she of all of them showed no fear. She came in with her eyes alight and her cheeks flaming, and she looked at John Selenger, her lover. I have no words to tell you how she looked at him.

"I knew you would do it, John," she said. "I knew you would save me."

Such lack of logic is maddening. How could she have known it? It was the veriest chance that permitted him to do even what he did. And even at that, he did not save her. Women are fools, all of them.

The hardness in John Selenger's face did not leave it, even when he looked at her.

"Do you know how many there are of these—devils?" he asked. "Are they all here?"

"There are twenty," said the woman. "I've counted them. Twenty besides him." She indicated Koshinga with a look of loathing.

A quick count showed Selenger that all were present.

The burning brand was growing short. Selenger stooped carefully, picked up another stick from a pile which lay at his feet, lit it from the first, and threw the short stub away. He was very cautious. There was never a moment when one of the two flaming menaces was not directly above the train of powder.

In a corner of the chamber there was a skein of stout twine used in binding packing cases. Selenger pointed to it with his

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unoccupied hand, and spoke again to Koshinga.

"Have half your men tie the other half, hand and foot. Then half of those that remain will tie the others, and so on till they're all tied. When I'm sure they're safe, this lady and you and I will take a walk. Give the orders."

Would Koshinga have obeyed? And if he had, could Selenger have carried out his purpose, which, plainly enough, was to take Koshinga prisoner, force him to lead himself and Vera Gray out of the cave, and march him a prisoner to Peking? Could we who were left trussed like fowl have released ourselves in time to follow and kill?

In other words, if I had held my hand, would Koshinga be ruling Asia today, and midway in his world-conquest? I do not know.

The hideous thought that struck me was this: With Koshinga a prisoner and our plans revealed to the world, the whole movement of the Ko Lao Hui, the entire age-old plot upon the success of which I had staked my life, would crumble like a house of cards. I would be buried beneath the debris, myself an outcast, my life ruined forever. It was that realization that nerved me to do what I did.

But the opportunity was an accident. Behind John Selenger, from the top of the hole which he had made in the wall, a heavy fragment of stone had been hanging precariously. Now it fell and crashed against the floor.

Selenger's nerves were on edge. Before he could think, he had turned half way around.

My revolver swung up as he turned, and I shot him through the head.

He fell backward, and the firebrand, as I had foreseen, fell clear of the powder. But I do not think that it touched the floor. Vera Gray was close beside him, and she snatched it up. And—so quickly it happened that there is no memory of her movement—she was standing as he had stood, with the brand again held over the powder. And I, who had not stirred from my place, held my revolver pointed at her head.

Vera Gray looked once at the bleeding body at her feet, once at me, once at the Chinese who were edging ever closer to her. Her fearless eyes became terror-stricken; her face, but a moment ago so flushed with hope, broke suddenly into a quivering whiteness. I thought she had realized her helplessness; I thought she was going to yield.

I put in a word that I thought would appal her woman's imagination.

"You will be torn to a million pieces," said I. "Your flesh will be driven into the rocks."

She shivered all over at the picture, and her hunted eyes flitted around the chamber, as if in search of a ray of hope, a hint of pity. They came to rest on the face of Koshinga. Then a horror came into them greater than the horror of death, a strange fear that lent her strength.

For her muscles tightened, her face grew steady and purposeful, and a triumphant exaltation past all understanding filled the glance she flung around at all of us.

"God will at least keep my flesh from mingling with yours," she cried, and she threw herself upon the body of her lover.

Or she started to so throw herself; I did not see the completion of the action. For I had known from her changed expression, for seconds enough to save myself, what she was about to do.

My foot had already pressed hard upon the hidden spring. The concealed trapdoor gave way beneath me, and snapped shut again above my head as I fell. And I dropped into blackness, and there was a roar like the sound of many thunders, and a shock as if the earth were crashing into chaos, and my mind went out on me, and I thought I had died.

But I found myself hours later sticking waist-deep in the mud into which I had fallen. For that secret vertical passage opened upon the edge of the subterranean lake—and across that subterranean lake, one passed into the world again.

And I passed out into that world alone, and I drift over it today like a wind-blown thistle. For Koshinga is dead, and my life is ended.

My empire has passed, my dream has passed, and there is nothing else that is real. For hatred without power is not real, and that is all there is left to me. And yet I like to feel it stirring, stirring—and to wake an answer to it in the souls of other men—and to prod their hatred and feed it until it rankles like a stinging serpent.

And so I tell this story to you gentlemen, you earth-worms—this story of a kingdom and a power and a glory that might have been, but which was destroyed by the unutterable folly of two of your kind.

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Magpie-Diplomat

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse," "Fifty-Fifty with Bonnie," etc.

TH' TWO jackasses which were in front stopped, and then me and Magpie Simpkins, which were behind, stopped also and there we sees 'em settin' along th' road on uh pile uh boulders.

There's three of 'em. Th' near one will stand about six feet six in his boots, and has uh face that any Roman-nosed hoss might envy. Th' next one is sorta built like uh bureau, and wears uh tobacco-stained mattress on th' lower level of his face.

Th' far one is uh runt. I'd opine that he'd occupy about five feet of th' atmosphere straight up, and yuh could split rails with his features. Th' redeemin' part of th' runt is his feet. If he ain't wearin' eight pairs uh wool socks inside them boots, he's got uh foundation like uh church.

"Holy mackerel!" sez Magpie. "If I was in Alaska I'd remark that some amatoor had tried to make three totem poles, but in this neck of th' timber I'd say—gosh, Ike, them's uh sad trio."

"Whither?" asks th' human chalk-line, without changin' uh feature.

"Yon," sez Magpie, pointin' east. "We're on uh pilgrimage to uh new settlement called Pinto. Know ye of it?"

"Do we?" asks th' slender one of th' other two.

Th' two of 'em spits in th' dust and nods—"We does."

"Anythin' doin' over there?" I asks.

They looks at each other agin and announces in chorus—

"There is."

"Don't tell us about it, cause th' surprise will do us good," sez Magpie.

Th' tall one uncoils hisself from th' boulder and hauls out uh knife and uh plug of tobacco. He slices off uh quarter section of township eight, pokes it into his mouth, wipes th' knife on his lips and sighs deep-like.

"Strangers," sez he, "th' keys of Pinto are yours. As th' mayor of said city I'm overjoyed to welcome yuh in, but I ain't aimin' to conduct no sight-seein' tower, sabe? Yuh got to see things all by yore lonesome.

"I'm Jefferson J. Jenkins, called 'Tex' by my friends, mayor of Pinto. This here party on my right, with th' Rip Van Winkle stubble on his chops, is Cold Deck Briggs, my chief of police, and this here miniature of uh sardine, which grows to man's estate only in th' feet, is Peevee Jack Skinner, treasurer."

"I'm Magpie Simpkins and this is Ike Harper," sez Magpie, bowin' low. "Th' names of them other two jackasses is Arabella and Phebe, and we're glad to meet yuh. You talks as though th' city had become boresome."

"Has it?" asks Jefferson J., known as 'Tex.'

"It has," agrees th' other two, and Tex backs their play.

"I hopes that you'll kindly ignore any and all inquiries as to our whereabouts, in case yore asked," sez Tex. "You fellers don't

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look like what I'd call harbingers uh joy yoreselves, and if it would cheer yuh up any I can elucidate uh tale uh wo what's uh humdinger."

"We're receptive to confidences," sez Magpie. "Shoot!"

We eases ourselves onto th' pile uh boulders, and rolls uh smoke. Tex cuts uh school section out of that plug, rolls it around in his face, and narrates thus:

"I'M MARRIED; Cold Deck's married and Peevee's married. That's th' —— of it! Gents, yuh can hardly believe that our wives are jealous of us, can yuh?"

Magpie looks 'em over careful-like and shakes his head.

"I oncet knowed uh white woman which fell in love with uh sheep-herder. Bein' uh great lover and disciple of th' truth, I'd shore appreciate it if you'd keep out uh fiction. Go ahead."

"It's uh fact, ain't it boys?" asks Tex.

Th' other two nods sadlike, and Tex continues:

"Th' three of us, beside bein' th' reignin' officers uh said town, are elected trustees of th' school. Eddication was our finish. I suppose that kids have to have schoolin' if they expects to be anybody—I didn't have none, and I'm uh mayor. Well, so long as we don't have no school everythin' is fine.

"When th' schoolhouse is built, we finds that we has to have uh teacher. Th' three of us confers, and disagrees, as usual. In fact th' disagreement gits so disagreeable that somebody has to bust th' lock on th' door and come in and pry us apart. Bein' uh wise ol' coot, I figgers that I'm th' one to go ahead and bust this deadlock. I don't seem to have no luck at all. Pinto don't seem to appeal to teachers none. I racks my ol' brain fer uh while, and then Jimmy McFee, our shaver, hair-cutter and tonsorial artist give me uh tip. It looks good.

"Jimmy shows me uh paper in which females states their desires to bust into matrimony. There's all kinds. Jimmy and me peruses said paper until we locates one which brands herself Miss Ivy Clemons. She alleges herself to be uncommon bright, havin' uh college eddication.

"That," sez Jimmy, "is whom yuh wants. All she wants is yore pitcher and uh few lyin' words to match hers. Sabe? She comes uh whoopin', and when she finds out that yore married she'll be pleased to teach school."

"Uh-huh," I agrees. "But I've got uh idea what beats that four ways from th' jack. Why send my pitcher, eh? Why not send uh pitcher of somebody else, Jimmy?"

Tex stopped and reached fer his plug, and Cold Deck opines:

"That shore was one hy-iu idea. Yuh see, gents, me and Tex and Peevee gits our pitchers took down to Great Falls this Spring, and we exchanges."

"Anyway," sez Peevee, "Tex oughta give me credit fer pickin' uh good looker fer him. Me and Jimmy ponders uh heap before we decides on her."

"Well," sez Cold Deck, "th' one what Tex sends my pitcher to wasn't much fer looks, but as uh hellwinder of uh talker I re-spects Tex's selection uh heap."

"I'd take it," sez Magpie wisely,"that you fellers, with th' able assistance of th' village whisker eradicator, double-crosses each other and gits in bad at home."

"Mister Simpkins, I wishes to shake yore hand," states Tex. "When I'm ol' and feeble I can tell my gran'children that oncet upon uh time I held th' paw of uh wise man. Shake."

"Clearest perception I ever seen," opines Cold Deck. "Don't he ketch on to things quick, Peevee?"

Peevee nods slowly, and goes on starin' at th' ground.

"Ain't yore wives got no use fer yuh at all?" I asks.

Th' three of 'em shakes their heads slowly, and Tex drawls:

"No-o-o, I can't say that they has. Cold Deck's wife has uh hoss-pistol, Peevee's has got his .45, and mine's got my ol' sawed-off shotgun. That's all they got for us—that we knows of."

"And she's got that ol' pistol loaded with chiny marbles, too!" wails Cold Deck. "I sees her put in four when I went home to explain. My goshafry! Four eight-gage chiny marbles inside yore hide would make yuh scratch some."

"Uh .45 raises somethin' beside uh rash," opines Peevee.

"And twelve buckshot to uh shell don't resemble uh mosquito bite," opines Tex. "That ol' riot gun is awful easy on th' trigger, too. Sometimes when yuh shoots

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one bar'el th' other goes off in sympathy with it. Sabe?"

"How'd yore wives git wise to them females?" asks Magpie.

"Git wise!" wails Cold Deck. "My gosh! Them three he-hunters happens to land in Pinto on th' same day. Th' one what is wished on me inquires as to my whereabouts, and ambles to my happy home. My wife comes to th' door, and this female asks if this is th' domicile of one, Mister Briggs. My wife opines that it is, and, bein' uh woman, she asks this person what she wants of Mister Briggs. This she-person hauls out that letter and my pitcher and opines that she's come all th' way from some danged place in th' East to make Mister Briggs uh good wife. My Gawd!"

"I suppose th' same thing happens at th' other homes," sez Magpie.

Tex nods, and Peevee inhales deep on his cigaret.

"Only at my bungaloo it was uh li'l different," states Peevee. "I was to home." He looks sadlike at his big feet, and hitches up his belt. "I ain't what you'd call uh fast person on th' hoof, and my wife overhauls me easy. She shore is one deadly person, and I distinctly remembers oncet that I promises to love, honor and obey her. Them first two promises was superfluous in my case."

"Mebby yúh could fix things up if yuh went about it in th' right way," I suggests; but Cold Deck looks at me sadlike and states:

"Mister, yore heart is in th' right place, but when it comes to wimmen yore heart don't count. It takes brains and muscle. Yore not married, I takes it."

"Yore welcome," I replies. "Life is too full uh worries fer me to locate uh mate."

"That's what I figgered, too," sez Tex. "Before I meets Anastasia I feels that I'm packin' uh load uh worries and wo, but I immediately and soon finds that I was jist packin' an empty saddle. Uh pack hoss, when he opines that he's packin' more than his share, can balk or amble between two trees and pull th' danged load off, but by th' whisperin' wolves, there ain't no two trees growin' close enough together to ever scrape th' load off my back. Also, if you've never been married, jist take it from me and don't balk after yuh do."

"Where do you fellers hail from?" asks Cold Deck.

"Piperock," sez Magpie.

"Know three hombres named Slim Hawkins, Andy Johnson and Weinie Lopp?"

"Shore we do—know 'em up, down and sideways. Why?"

"They're down there," states Cold Deck mournful-like, pointin' down th' road. "Th' one what calls hisself Andy Johnson assaults me yesterday and pins my star on uh tame coyote pup. Also he ties uh can to th' animile. I'm agin that hombre—me."

"Also I ain't makin' no love-medicine to th' one named Slim," orates Peevee Jack. "He sets into my li'l game uh draw yesterday. Bein' lit up to uh certain extent he has more luck than observation—I thought. Figgerin' that it's about time fer him to hit th' earth, I signals th' bartender and he slips me uh cold deck. I don't know how it's done, but when th' showdown comes I'm trailin' his four aces with four kings, and th' treasury of Pinto is gone."

"And Weinie," sez Magpie. "What's he done?"

"Nothin'," sez Tex. "He's plumb tame compared with th' other two. All he's done in th' last few days is to sell th' Palace saloon to three different persons.

"So Weinie owned uh saloon at last," sez I. "Well, well!"

"He never owned nothin' in th' saloon line except uh thirst!" snorts Tex. "I said he sold one. Sabe?"

Magpie scratches his head and pulls out uh li'l red note-book and uh pencil.

"I begins to see uh light," he states. "Give me th' names uh them three female man-hunters."

"Miss Ivy Clemons, Miss Estelle Waterbury and—Peevee, what was th' name of th' queen you discards?"

"Clementine Margareet Elvington."

Magpie writes th' names down, puts th' book in his pocket, and stands up.

"Well, Ike," sez he, yawnin', "I reckon we better be moseyin' on. What do you fellers aim to do—set here all yore lives?"

"I gotta do my assessment work on th' Merry Ellen before New Year's," states Peevee, spittin' at uh rock lizard and hittin' his boot.

"Well," sez I, "this is th' last of August, so yuh better git uh move on yoreself, old-timer. Any he-person who ain't man enough to boss his own house will shore need about four months to do uh hundred dollars' worth uh work on uh prospect."

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"Them's my ideas to uh gnat's eyebrow," he states. "Uh man oughta be uh man among men. Am I right, Tex?"

"When his wife's got uh gun?"

"Gosh!" sez Peevee. "I done forgot that li'l detail. Anyway, Tex, we can't stand out here and starve. Let's go in and trust to luck."

Tex gits up, takes uh fresh bite off th' plug, and hitches up his belt.

"All right," sez he. "Uh riot gun makes uh messy-lookin' corpse, but I'd jist as soon be dead as lonesome. Come on, Cold Deck."

"Four li'l chiny marbles," mumbles Cold Deck, countin' on his fingers. "My gosh-afry! Uh feller wouldn't have stren'th enough left to pull off his boots. Them marbles are about ten-gage, and they won't all hit together."

We strings off up th' road towards Pinto, and Ike Harper is behind th' procession. It's uh trait of th' Harper tribe to allus guard th' rear.

PINTO was uh city which sprung from nothin' and she showed it in every line. By actual count there was twelve houses on th' main street, which they calls Sycamore Avenue after uh lone, impoverished mesquite which they leaves in th' public square. Of th' twelve aforementioned houses on Sycamore Avenue, two are business houses and th' rest are saloons and dance-halls.

Pinto was uh necessity—like arsenic, strychnine and sawed-off shotguns. One day uh pore ol' whisker-packin' prospector knocks uh piece uh rock off uh ledge and opines that he's got th' world by th' tail and uh downhill drag.

Like all of his kind he swears to hisself that he won't tell uh single soul of his find. He don't. He gits to town, fills his skin with laughin' water and opines that he's got uh message for th' world. He climbs on th' bar and tells about uh hundred willin' listeners where there's uh ledge uh free millin' that will run about five hundred to th' ton. Therefore Pinto. Th' original discovery, Th' Weddin' Ring, is th' only rich property, and after th' first rush th' town gits back to th' level of uh one-mine town and drifts on.

We pilgrims to th' outskirts and stops fer uh conference.

"Gents," sez Magpie, "I got a idea. Do yuh sabe deeplomacy?"

"Metal, disease or uh human bein'?" asks Tex.

"Neither," sez Magpie. "It's uh state of affairs. Suppose you fellers hive up some place while me and Ike converses with yore wives. Sympathy is shore uh strike buster fer jealousy, and we'll work on their feelin's. Sabe?"

"That's friendly talk, mister," opines Peevee. "You never seen my wife—yet—so be glad. We'll await yore comin' in th' back room of th' Palace saloon. *Adios.*"

Tex diagrams th' village so we can find their homes, and then we pilgrims out to seek fer sympathy.

We selects Cold Deck's bungaloo first. There's uh meek-lookin' woman on th' porch, and we sees her slip what looks uh heap like uh pistol under her apron when she comes out to meet us.

"Howdy, ma'am," sez Magpie. "Is this th' widow of Cold Deck Briggs?"

"Widow?" sez she. "Has Cold Deck been——"

"Yes'm, he has. I hates to break th' bad news to you, ma'am, but somebody has to do it, and me bein' uh stranger, they asks me to do it. Yuh see Cold Deck was sorta despondent about somethin', ma'am, and he tries to relieve his sufferin' with uh rope."

"Tries to?" she snorts.

"Shore," sez Magpie. "Th' rope broke. Mebby he'll recover, ma'am, but it's best to be prepared."

"Well," sez she, half hitchin' her back hair with uh pin, "I thought at first that you was a lyin' to me, but that last part sounds jist like him. Miles uh good rope, and he picks uh pore piece. Good afternoon."

"That," sez Magpie, as we pokes th' burros down towards Tex's place, "shore prejudices me agin wimmin, Ike. They ain't got no hearts."

"After knowin' Cold Deck fer uh while I'm of th' opinion that she's plumb normal and of uh sympathetic disposition," sez I.

"Ma'am," sez Magpie to th' fattest specimen of fe-male humanity I ever seen, which comes to th' door of th' shack, "I'm uh bearer of bad news."

"S-s-s-shoot!" she wheezes.

Yore husband, ma'am, is—yuh see, Mrs. Jenkins, a Injun follers yore husband out uh town and, as I was sayin'——".

"Th'-th'-th' Injun k-k-k-killed him?" she stutters.

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"Uh-huh," nods Magpie. "Leastwise he may be dead. Yuh see, ma'am, yuh can't always tell from appearances. Me and Ike arrives on th' scene jist as th' Injun was goin' to scalp him and——"

"G-g-g-g-goin' to s-s-s-scalp Tex! G-g-g-gosh! He-he ain't got no ha-ha-hair!"

"Yuh see, ma'am," explains Magpie, "he still has his hat on and th' Injun didn't know that he was bald."

"Did yuh-yuh-yuh search his po-po-pockets?" she splutters.

I informs her that me and Magpie are uh pair of honest prospectors, and it seems to touch her uh heap. She wipes her eyes on her apron and backs into th' house. Jist when she's about half in and half out she remarks in what ain't exactly uh sad voice, but still it's sorta melancholy—"He had eighty-eighty-eighty dollars in his po-po-pockets when he left and I sup-sup-suppose I'll never s-s-s-see it agin."

We shoves th' burros around so they're headed fer Peevee's domicile, and pilgrims on.

"After seein' her," opines Magpie, "I can partly understand Tex's statement that their wives is jealous of 'em. Tex has my sympathy, Ike."

"As crape-hangers, Magpie, we resembles Santa Claus uh heap," I replies.

I'll state right here that Peevee runs true to form. It allus seems to me that uh li'l runt that can look uh jackrabbit in th' face without bendin' his back—th' man's of course—seems to allus pick uh truck hoss of uh woman fer uh mate, and Peevee wasn't no exception. She shore was full grown.

I looks her over in th' doorway, and then whispers to Magpie, as we nears th' gate—"She shore must have uh meek disposition to have to use uh .45 on Peevee."

"Ma'am," sez Magpie, takin' off his hat and bendin' low, "we're th' sorrowful bringers of bad news to you and yours."

"You're doin' th' talkin'!" she snaps.

"Yore late husband, ma'am——"

"As usual," sez she. "Go on."

"As I was sayin', ma'am, yore late husband, Peevee Jack Skinner, was bit by uh rattlesnake, and by this time is probably an 'also ran' in th' human race. I'm sorry, ma'am, but——"

"Where is th' snake?" she asks.

"I killed it," sez Magpie, "and throwed it's mangled remains into the' rocks."

"Where?" she snaps.

"Well—uh—why th' interest in th' snake? It's dead."

"I jist wanted to know," sez she, steppin' inside, and half closin' th' door, "so I can find it and give it uh decent burial. I admires anythin' with nerve, and any snake that would take uh chance on bitin' Peevee Skinner is shore entitled to uh heeroe's grave."

"Ike, we found sympathy," sez Magpie as we pilgrims back to town.

"With th' reverse English," sez I. "If all th' sympathy between them three wives and three husbands was collected in one heap it wouldn't throw an assayer's scale out of balance—and them scales weighs uh pencil mark."

"WELL, you ol' pelicans," whoops uh voice in our ear, and here comes Weinie Loop down Sycamore Avenue. "Where in thunder did you people come from? Welcome to——"

Weinie's sombrero snaps off his head, and from down th' avenue comes th' whang of uh six-gun. Weinie picks up th' hat and steps into th' protection of th' corner of uh house. He peeks around th' corner fer uh minute, and then holds out th' hat fer our inspection.

"That's th' third time today," sez he sorta solemn-like.

"If this keeps up I'll have to git uh new lid."

"Why th' target practice?" I asks.

"Non-appreciation of humor, Ike. Yesterday I sells th' Weddin Ring mine to three different parties, each time it was uh bargain—fer cash— and now they're showin' their appreciation by tryin' to lead me up."

"I hears that yore specialty was sellin' saloons," laughs Magpie.

"Uh-huh," grins Weinie. "I'm uh reg'lar real-estater. I'll sell anything!"

"Got anythin' on hand right now?" I asks.

"Nope," states Weinie, peekin' around th' corner and exposin' his hat without gettin' uh slug. "If this keeps up though, Ike, I'm goin' to git uh option on uh piece uh ground out north uh town and start uh cemetery. These Pinto hombres can't shoot, but I'm gittin' tired of dodgin'—and uh hat like that costs money. Have yuh seen Slim and Andy yet?"

"Jist got in," sez Magpie.

"Lets go and see 'em," suggests Weinie.

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"Slim won th' poker game in th' Pioneer saloon yesterday, and he's runnin' it at uh profit. I reckon that Andy is helpin'. Andy got in bad with th' authorities, but that don't mean nothin'. What you fellers doin' way over here?"

"Weinie, can you keep yore mouth shut?" asks Magpie.

"Like uh clam, Magpie. Shoot!"

"Now listen Weinie, this ain't to be mentioned to uh soul. Somebody'll shore git in bad if yuh spreads it. Sabe?"

"I hopes I marries uh ornery, hombly specimen of female, and that all th' deevorce judges loses their voice if I ever breathes uh word, Magpie. Cross my heart."

Magpie hauls out that li'l red book and fumbles th' pages.

"Weinie, did yuh ever hear of folks by th' names of Miss Ivy Clemons, Miss Estelle Waterbury and Miss Clementine Margareet Elvington?"

"Shore. And th' Duke of Buckin'ham. I've read most all them kinda novels. Magpie. I remembers in th' last one——"

"This ain't no novel," states Magpie. "Th' people I mentions are right here in Pinto. Leastwise they ought to be."

"Go ahead—I'll bite," laughs Weinie, takin' another cautious peek around th' corner.

"Lissen closely," sez Magpie. "These three females are from th' Far East, and they're reekin' with money. They don't wish people to know who they are so they ain't makin' no blow about their wealth. Sabe? Since that last strike on th' Weddin' Ring, Weinie, this country is advertised uh heap through th' East.

"Bein' business people these three she persons opine that they can come here and corral uh bunch uh property, and do it uh heap cheaper than uh man could. It stands to reason that nobody is goin' to hand uh gold brick to uh trustin' woman."

"You spoke uh heap, Magpie," agrees Weinie. "Air these she persons good to look upon?"

"Beauty is only skin deep, Weinie, and money makes uh pore complexion bloom like uh rose. I ain't seen 'em yet."

"Uh course I don't want this to become general knowledge," continues Magpie, "'cause me and Ike figgers that we has th' first show. Mebby we can peddle some prospects and ——"

"Dog-gone ol' pelicans," snickers Weinie, punchin' Magpie in th' ribs. "Fortune hunters, eh? What's th' matter with lettin' li'l Weinie into th' game, eh?"

"Mebby, later on. Yuh see, me and Ike ain't matrimonial inclined, and when some uh these Pinto snake-hunters gits wise to their money we'll have too danged many to buck. Just give me and Ike uh chance to make uh stake, and then th' hull population of Pinto can fight to see who marries 'em. Havin' money, they can shore pick and choose. Sabe?"

"I suppose there ain't nothin' again me tryin' to sell 'em uh saloon is there?" laughs Weinie.

"Go to it!" sez Magpie. "Me and Ike are goin' to find somethin' to eat, and then we'll probably come over to see Slim and Andy."

"I'll tell 'em yore in town," sez Weinie. "Now, if I can git across th' street without gittin' another hole in my hat, I'll be lucky."

We stands there and watches him. He ducks low and races across. When he's almost across we sees him grab his hat off and tuck it under his arm, and then we hears th' *pop* of uh six-gun down th' street. Weinie stops in th' saloon door long enough to put his thumb to his nose and wiggle his fingers at somebody down th' street.

"Magpie," sez I, "you shore got Ananias out on uh limb. What's th' idea of all these pervarications?"

"Deeplomacy, Ike. I feels deeply fer th' officials of this fair city and I aims to bring peace and comfort to their homes."

"Mebby," sez I. "I don't sabe that word yuh jist used but I shore do recognize uh danged lie when I sees it. As fer unitin' them lovin' famblys agin—I'm uh disciple of brotherly love—me."

"Jist remember, Ike, be it ever so humble there's no place like home."

"Humbleness, forty-fives, riot-guns and hoss-pistols make uh real cheerful combination," I opines.

"Anyway, I've started th' campaign, Ike."

"Meanin' which?"

"Tellin' Weinie. He dodged bullets to git across there and put Andy and Slim wise to th' game. I'll bet right now that them hombres are figgerin' in millions. Let's go find them three sorrowin' sons."

We pilgrims around behind th' Palace saloon and dumps th' packs off our livestock.

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"How'd yuh find things?" asks uh voice, and we turns to see Tex Jenkins' long face stickin' out of uh window, and right behind him appears Cold Deck and Peevee. They're anxious lookin'.

"Yore uh fine crew," laughs Magpie. "Lettin' uh pore inoffensive fe-male run blazers on yuh thataway. From what I can gather they're shore feelin' bad about it."

"What'd yuh tell my wife?" asks Cold Deck.

"I showed her th' error of her ways, and she almost weeps."

"Did my wife weep?" inquires Peevee. "She didn't, did she?"

"No," sez Magpie, "she didn't weep, but she felt bad. She remarks somethin' about uh heero, and then goes into th' house. Uh woman hates to have uh man see her cry—especially uh strong woman."

"She's strong enough," agrees Peevee "but that heero stuff don't sound edzactly like her. Much obliged though."

"Yore welcome," states Magpie. "Where can I find them three home-hunters?"

"They're over to th' St. Charles hotel," sez Tex. "At least they was this mawnin'."

"We'll go over there, Ike, and see what we can do fer their comforts. I was born with uh sympathetic disposition and I can't bear sufferin'. Tex, I'm goin' to ask uh favor of you three fellers. No matter what happens, don't tell anybody what yuh knows about these three fe-males. Sabe? Yuh can tell yore wives, of course, but they won't believe yuh anyway. I'm doin' all this fer yore good, so don't peddle no information."

While we're crossin' Sycamore Avenue to th' hotel, I takes off my hat to Magpie three times. As uh liar I admires him. I allus admires uh good liar. They say George Washington couldn't tell uh lie, but I've got it on him four ways from th' Jack. I can lie but I don't dare to. Everybody knows when I strays from th' straight and narrer and sometimes they thinks so when I don't stray. I can't grow whiskers thick enough on my face to tell uh lie and play safe.

We finds them fe-males right away. They're infestin' th' parlor, and Magpie butts in and starts conversin' like he'd knowed 'em all his life. He introduces me and himself, and one of th' ladies makes us used to th' other two. I didn't look at their teeth, but I'd opine that they'd range from thirty-five to forty-five. Miss Waterbury is about thirty-five, yaller-haired, and sorta built fer speed up to about four hundred yards.

Miss Clemons has black hair, brown eyes and will weight about one-eighty on th' hoof. She's got uh kind eye. Miss Elvington favors uh lodge-pole uh heap and is wearin' enough brown hair to make uh swing rope. From what I can see of th' paint on her face, she's on th' war path or gittin' ready to start.

"Ladies," sez Magpie, "we understands how yuh happens to come out here and we're here as uh committee uh two to try and find means uh settlin' th' tangle. You can all be glad that yuh didn't git th' husbands you expected. Myself, I don't believe in annexin' uh husband by mail, but it takes all kinds uh marriages to make uh community."

"What would you suggest," asks Miss Clementine. "We came out here in good faith, and now we haven't enough money to get home."

"Yore prime object was matrimony, wasn't it, ma'am?"

They all nods.

"Ladies, I've got a idea," sez Magpie. "In this town is three men who would make three good wimmen, husbands. Sabe? They're from th' same town as we are and we're plumb anxious to see 'em married and settled down. If they knowed that you wanted to marry 'em they'd shy like uh bronc at uh paper sack, but if yuh works it right you'll land 'em. It has been rumored that you three ladies are wealthy persons from th' East who are out here to look over some minin' propositions. Don't dispute it. Have yuh got enough money to last uh week?"

"Possibly we could exist for two weeks," laughs Miss Clemons.

"Do it," advises Magpie, and then we pilgrims out of th' hotel.

"Now," sez Magpie, "let's go over and git them burros and be on our way."

"On our way?" I asks. "Where we goin' now?"

"Prospectin', Ike. We came down here to hunt gold—not to enjoy th' flesh pots. Anyway, I don't think we could do any more good here at present."

"If yuh calls it 'good,' I reckon not," I agrees. "Me—I'm plenty willin' to leave here."

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We throws th' packs on th' burros and starts amblin' out of town when here comes uh feller down th' street, limpin' and cussin' uh blue streak. It's Cold Deck.

"Four chiny marbles!" he wails, pointin' at his legs. "What in —— did you tell her? I gits in sight of th' front door, and out she lopes with that hoss-pistol in her hand. She yells somethin' at me about tryin' uh new rope, and then she cuts down on me with that danged pistol!"

Jist as Magpie clears his throat to answer, here comes Peevee around th' corner. He's sorta runnin' regardless and lookin' over his shoulder like uh rabbit when uh coyote presses him close. He races right up to us, digs th' heels of his big boots in th' dirt and skids to uh dead stop.

"My Gawd!" sez he. "My ol' woman's gone plumb loco! She meets me at th' door with that ol' forty-five, and sez: 'I didn't think it could be true, Peevee. No snake would take uh big chance like that'."

"Did she shoot at yuh?" asks Cold Deck.

"Danged if I know. I was too busy to even listen. That woman ain't jealous—she's crazy!"

"So's mine," agrees Cold Deck. "I reckon she couldn't stand all that sorrow. She's gone hemp crazy, but blast it, she ain't too crazy to shoot!"

"Lissen!" sez Magpie. "If you fellers wants me to save yore happy homes from bein' wrecked, keep yore mouths shut. Sabe? No matter what comes off here in Pinto, you fellers keep still about them three wimmin. In this here game uh deeplomacy yuh got to ——"

From far off across th' city comes th' dull *boom* of uh gun and we looks foolish like at each other.

"Both bar'els of uh riot-gun," states Magpie. "Ike, lets git a goin'."

We did. When we're almost out of sight we looks back and we sees uh lanky figger come limpin' down th' street and join th' two we jist left.

"It wasn't serious," opines Magpie. "She must 'a' shut both eyes."

WE PILGRIMS out into th' hills away from Pinto. There's several outfits gopherin' around th' hills, and we digs uh few holes ourselves. Whoever or whatever pours th' gold into th' Weddin' Ring mine shore didn't spill any of it while they was packin' it over, cause that country shore is one barren spot.

After pilgrimin' around fer uh couple uh weeks, we decides that there ain't enough gold in them hills to fill uh tooth, and so we starts back.

We're amblin' down uh dry wash that mornin' when we meets uh caravan.

Out in front walks that human chalk-line, Tex Jenkins, then comes three burros, and in th' rear plods Cold Deck and Peevee Jack.

"*Klahowya!*" sez Tex. "Havin' any luck?"

"No," sez Magpie. "There ain't nothin' in these hills. We've combed 'em from rimrock to peaks without findin' uh color. You fellers might as well turn around and come back."

"Shall we?" asks Tex to his pardners.

"No!" snaps th' other two.

"Yore wastin' yore time tryin' to find anythin'," I argues.

"Aw, we'll find it all right," argues Cold Deck. "We ain't lookin' fer th' same thing you fellers are."

"Ain't yuh lookin' fer gold?" asks Magpie.

"Not any," states Peevee, takin' off one of his man-sized boots and shakin' th' dust out. "Yore gazin' upon uh new kind of uh prospectin' outfit, Mister Simpkins. Rest yore eyes on this layout, 'cause yuh won't never see another on th' same quest. We don't want gold nor precious metals, and we ain't huntin' fer oil. Mebby she ain't here, but we're lookin'."

"Meanin'?" I asks.

"Peace," sez Peevee.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Magpie. "Bunch uh dove-hunters, eh? I'd opine from that that yore all in bad at home agin'."

"Agin!" snorts Tex. "Did you fellers notice that he said 'agin'? Mister Simpkins, I wishes to inform yuh that it is 'yet'!"

"Did I tell yuh about them marbles?" asks Cold Deck, pullin' out four round pieces uh chiny and rollin' 'em around in his hand. "These four ranges from my wishbone to my corns, and they shore did sting yours truly, Cold Deck Briggs, Esq."

"So you fellers left yore official jobs and wives, eh?" grins Magpie. "Well, well!"

"We pleads guilty to th' wives," sez Tex, sad like. "We thinks too much of our

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wives to give 'em any more chances to appear as defendants in uh murder trial. As to our official jobs ——"

"We sold 'em," grins Cold Deck. "Yes, sir, we peddles our titles and good will."

"But yuh can't sell an official job," argues Magpie.

"Can't we?" askes Cold Deck, turnin' to Tex and Peevee.

They both nods and Tex states:

"There ain't nothin' yuh can't sell in Pinto. Weinie's sellin' shares in th' Panama Canal. Mayorin' is un under-paid chore, so I sells cheap."

"How could yuh sell yore jobs and who to?" I asks.

Tex bites th' size of uh placer claim out of his plug and sets down on uh rock.

"Well, yuh see when we're approached in th' matter we deliberates and accepts, contingent on it bein' satisfactory to th' city. We calls uh meetin' of me and Cold Deck and Peevee, and, bein' unanamous that we has th' right, we adjourns and accepts th' office."

"I'm pleased," states Cold Deck. "Ever since that coyote pup runs away with my star, and since Peevee tries to make four kings beat four aces, there ain't been no joy in our jobs."

"Who buys yuh out?" I asks.

"Mister Hawkins is th' mayor, Mister Lopp is treasurer, and Andy Johnson is chief of police," replies Cold Deck.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Tex, slappin' his hat on his leg. "I almost forgot to tell yuh. They starts right in makin' out a new ordinance. They—haw! haw!—they draws up one to th' effect that no man can peddle uh minin' claim in Pinto unless said peddler has been uh citizen of Pinto for three weeks."

"What's so danged funny about that?" I asks.

"Haw! Haw!" yelps Tex, fannin' uh burro away with his hat.

"That's fer you two fellers. I hears Hawkins tell Johnson that this ordinance will keep some ladies from bein' taken in on uh wild-cat proposition by them danged ol' packrats. I hears yore names mentioned soon afterwards, so I reckon they shore means you."

"Is them three male-hunters there yet?" asks Magpie.

"Are they!" snorts Cold Deck. "They jist about are! Uh course me and Tex and Peevee has too much troubles of our own to pay much attention, and accordin' to yore instructions we keeps our mouths shut, but I feels that them ladies is responsible fer them three fellers desirin' to occupy our positions. These three new officials shore grades high with them wimmen, and they rides herd on that St. Charles hotel some rigorous."

"Well," sez Magpie, haulin' our burros around so they points down hill, "I wish you luck. Peace is like gold—where yuh finds it. *Klahowya.*"

THEY pokes on up th' dry wash, and me and Magpie and th' other two jackasses pilgrims on towards sea level. About ten miles below where we intercepts th' peace party, we cuts into th' Pinto road and stops.

"I'd shore like to go over there," sez Magpie. "But then, yuh never can tell. Mebby them three hombres has drafted another ordinance or two in our favor. We'll let well enough alone, Ike."

We ambles on down th' road, and jist as we're approachin' th' spot where we first meets them son's uh sorrow I bumps into th' rear burro, and finds that our caravan is stopped.

"Cripes!" sez Magpie. "Look what's here, Ike."

Right on that pile uh boulders, where we first spots them sons uh sorrow, we sees three more.

As before, th' near one favors uh lodgepole uh heap, and he's doubled up like uh jack-knife, with his chin in his hands. Th' next one is sprawled on th' ground with his shoulder-blades propped up agin uh rock, and all yuh can see in th' shade of his hat is th' tips of his mustache. Th' third one is short and kinda fat-like and is doubled up like he had th' cramps in his stummick. His face bears out this statement.

"Whither?" asks th' slender one, removin' uh limp cigaret from his mouth.

"Yon," sez Magpie, pointin' off down th' road. "We pilgrim to Piperock."

"Me, too," states th' slim one, uncoilin' himself from th' rock.

"You and me both," opines th' one with th' mustache, gittin' up and dustin' off th' seat of his pants.

Th' four of us ambles off down th' road in th' dust of them burros, while th' fat one with th' cramp expression still sets there and contemplates th' sins of mankind.

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"Ain't Weinie comin' along, Slim?" asks Magpie, lookin' back.

"Naw," sez Slim. "Weinie can't—he's married."

"Married!" yelps Magpie. "Who'd he marry?"

"Weinie married," sez Andy Johnson, slow and distinct like, "Weinie married uh millionairess, Magpie. All kinds of money."

"Yes," sez Slim, "all kinds is right. One dollar, uh four-bit piece, uh Canadian quarter, two nickels and uh dime."

"Wasn't there three of them wealthy wimmin?" asks Magpie.

"Huh!" snorts Slim. "Wealthy!"

"Yuh see," explains Andy, "one more deal around saves our bacon. Uh five-dollar jack-pot game is hard to leave, even to git married.

"Weinie gits tired of waitin' fer us and marries his. This was to be uh three-cornered affair, and when me and Slim tears away from th' game, and starts fer th' hotel, we meets three other she persons.

"One of 'em—uh whale of uh fe-male—stops us and asks if we're th' persons who are due to git married today. I informs her that she's lookin' at th' happy people. She asks me if I know whether one uh them wimmen is tryin' to win her husband, Peevee Jack Skinner, away from her.

"Slim cuts in and sez, 'Ma'am, you can bet yore life there ain't uh word uh truth in it.' She turns to th' other two and opines: 'I reckon mebby we were uh bit hasty about it. Somebody jobbed 'em, and we'd better git 'em back home agin.'

"She thanks us fer th' information, and then th' fat one sez: 'I-I-I hopes you-you-you'll be ha-ha-happy with uh ha-ha-ha-heart and ha-ha-hand w-w-w-woman.'

" 'What do yuh mean?' asks Slim.

" 'Go and find out from them,' sez th' husky one. 'Mebby you'll be happy, but them kinda marriages—with wimmen who advertises in matrimonial papers and is penniless—wasn't made in heaven.' "

"What did you do then?" asks Magpie.

"Had to go back to Piperock on foot," grins Slim. "Yuh see, Magpie, we loses our broncs and saddles before luck breaks our way, but we annexes enough loose change to buy more, and don't worry none. Bein' on th' level, we buys tickets and ships them misguided fe-males back to their home range.

"Yuh got to hand it to them females fer bein' honest, though," states Andy. "They never lied to us oncet."

"Didn't they claim to be wealthy?" I asks.

"Not a claim," sez Slim.

"Who told you they was, Slim?" asks Magpie.

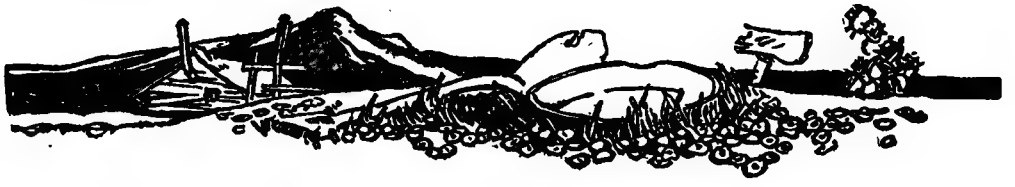
"Why—huh—I believe Weinie did."

"Pore ol' Weinie," sez I. "Like uh lot uh danged fools he believed all he heard and passed it along fer Gospel."

"Aw, Weinie ain't so bad off at that," laughs Slim. "Weinie never had nothin' in his life so he can't lose. His wife is goin' to teach school in Pinto, and if Weinie can sell uh few saloons every week, they'll git along, Ike."

"Worked out to uh gnat's eyebrow, Ike," sez Magpie, grinnin' through th' alkali dust on his face. "Deeplomacy is th' clear McCoy, ol'-timer."

All of which makes me think that it takes uh lot uh luck and uh bunch uh lies to qualify in that line.



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Before The Ice Went Out

by Berthe Knatvold Mellett.

Author of "Memory Miles."

HAINES GRAHAM is planting coffee somewheres and casting eyes on the señoritas. Lou LeRoy has gone the way she said she would. Ole Swan can't read English, and Jim Stone is God knows where. So I guess there ain't much personal risk any more in telling this thing.

It was in the big Dawson days—those days when a man paid ten thousand dollars for half interest in a tent saloon that had three weeks to run, and made a fortune on the deal. There had been five million dollars in dust circulating between seventeen hundred men the Spring before. Then news got to the outside, and when navigation opened the world ran north, which reduced the per capita considerable.

However, the pokes packed in from the creeks every day was heavy enough to keep life booming in the camp, and every man was a millionaire; if not in fact, then in faith.

I didn't have any of the actual dust. But I'm a California pocket miner by trade and nature, and it ain't what was in the last pan I washed out, but what I think is going to be in the next, that keeps me joyful. I'd gone north at the first whisper of a gold strike. Having finished raising my girls—two of them married and Effie, the littlest, teaching school—left me free, so I went.

Out on a bum stampede I met up with Russell Williams. He was about half my age, just out of Stanford, and a number of things you'd think would make us uncongenial spirits. But we hit it off together, and stuck from then on.

The Winter I'm telling about we'd followed a choice lot of forlorn hopes, and finally come back to town, waiting for Spring to open up something new along the creeks. Fate first showed up in our affairs through Mary McKay and Ole Swan.

Russ'd filled up the Yukon stove in the shack, and about the time it got het up nice and red the clothes-line above it busted, and an Arctic sock drying there dropped. I had to open the door and let out the smudge.

"Smoke's coming out of the little stenographer's stovepipe," I remarked when I turned back to the room.

"The hound," comes from Russ. "Four days' grub and set adrift down the river'd be too good for him."

Interpreted this means that the year before, along with the first rush, as nice a looking girl as you'd look to see anywhere, let alone in a mining camp, came to Dawson. She could typewrite, and got a job at Haines Graham's store. Me and Russ used to drop in and look at her, as she sat pounding away back of the partition that marked off the office from the rest of the shebang.

Graham is handsome and no good. Too soon for the north to show its hardening effect on her and so take off the shock for the rest of us, the stenographer was out of the office and in the log house across from us that Graham'd had built and furnished.

Me and Russ struck out for somewheres

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after that and didn't hear what had happened until we got back. Then we was told how Lou LeRoy, who'd pre-empted Graham the year before, had got wind of the shack and its occupant. And the little stenographer, her eyes opened by the lady from the dance-hall, took herself out of the mess by the forty-five-caliber route.

"Wonder who it is this time," I said, going back to the subject of the smoke.

"It isn't so much who it is as what the LeRoy will do when she hears," Russ answered after he'd fixed the line so it wouldn't drop no more wool offerings on our altar.

WE MIGHT have speculated more but at that minute we got a visitor. The door opened again, and there in the frigid block of air loomed the biggest human hulk I ever see outside a show.

"You tak power uf attorney?" he kind of singsonged.

"Come in. Shut the door," yells Russ hospitable.

"Tak power uf attorney?" repeats our guest after he'd done like Russ asks, and he stands flattering our coal-oil lamp by blinking at its sooty light.

We all did favors for each other at that time, and it wasn't unusual for a stampeding miner to leave his power of attorney with a neighbor when he started out.

"Ya," he sings on softly after we've said we would, "Ya—and for fem toosen dollar you sell Villow Distant Claim."

We make out that fem toosen is his language for five thousand and that Willow Distant is a claim he wants to get rid of while he's looking for another. He gives us a map, some specimens of dust in a pill-bottle, a lot of Swede hot air, and a power of attorney. Then he leaves.

It began to snow after that, and snow ain't the name for it. With the thermometer h'isting toward Spring old man Winter give a final heave in his feather bed. The blizzard lasted two days, and just as it began to clear there came a knock at our door.

"Come!" sang Russ.

We looked up from our turkey dinner of beans, and there—inside our house—stood the prettiest little woman thing that ever looked out of the wolverine border of a parka hood. For a minute something got a strangle hold on my Adam's apple. You see I've raised three girls of my own.

"My dog's lost!" She is nervous and embarrassed. "Brown—curly——"

I can't look at Russ. When a man is being hanged for his crimes it's too tough for a friend to look at. There'd been a dog, a brown curly dog, and prior to the opening of the door two days before to let out the smell of burned sock, there'd been a caribou steak. Now there was no dog and no steak, and one stick of stove-wood short.

"Haven't seen him to-day," says Russ, miserable.

"He was gone before the snow—but I couldn't get out."

"Where does your dog usually go?" I asked to give Russ time.

But the words were no sooner out than I forgot all about the dog and something yanked like a tightening rope under my ribs. There's only one thing makes man or woman look at beans the way that little girl looked at our grub. She was hungry.

"Russ," I suggested. "Maybe you'd better flounder around a little looking for the lady's dog."

Russ is only too glad to take his conscience for a walk.

I started raising my three girls when their mother was took, while yet Effie was too little to fill the hollow of my arm. And they've come out fine, which shows I know how to get at what's in girls' hearts.

Russ was no sooner out of the shack than I set that girl down to the table with a plate of beans before her, and I don't believe she knows to this day when it was she began to tell her story. But I could tell you the minute she pushed back her parka hood and I saw the babyish round of her forehead—like Effie's—and began to ask myself if I wasn't done raising girls.

Her story was one of those that make you wonder why they don't teach understanding of youth and human nature in the schools and make the course compulsory for fathers. The girl had been left, like my girls, with just a poor stick of a man to raise her. I suppose he thought he was doing his duty by her. But all the nearer he ever got to her heart was to hurt it and try to age it and make it into something old and dreary before its time.

"And—" she faltered a lot all the way through—"after that last night, when he shamed me before all the other boys and girls who were having such a good time, why I—I was desperate! The party was all right—two mothers were chaperoning—and

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we were only having the kind of fun that young people have to have, or die.

"When he got me home and sent me to bed, I lay planning and planning. I had a watch and some rings, the silver things on my dresser and the baby spoons my mother had put away for me. They made enough to buy me a ticket to Dawson. Everybody was talking about Dawson—I guess that was why I came. But I got awfully frightened as soon as we had left San Francisco. If it hadn't been for Mrs. Johnson——"

"There, there," I said, putting my hand over hers. "Mrs. Johnson—which Mrs. Johnson?"

"She's been with her husband out on the creek. I stayed with her on the boat, and have been with her here. But last week she started with her husband for a new strike, and I came to town to look for work."

"Yes," I says, making the tone natural for all the memory of the little stenographer that rose up between that child and me.

Then through that ghost I see the round of her forehead, like Effie's, and the something in her eyes that was like my baby's.

"Yes," I says again.

"Mr. Graham didn't have anything in the store, but he knew about this place——"

She waved toward the house opposite. Not a sound came from my throat for all that took place inside.

"He said Mrs. Smith was away, but that she had left word with him to find some one who would stay with her and help in the house. He gave me the key and told me to help myself to what I found, and he would bring provisions. But it began to snow."

It ain't often one blesses a blizzard, but I done it then.

"Best leave Haines Graham's groceries be," I says. "Russ and me'll stake you to what we got. What's your name?"

"Mary—Mary McKay."

"Mary," I starts like a sermon, "if you had it all to do over again you wouldn't get mad at your pa and run away."

"No," she kind of moans. "No."

"You're here and Winter's here and Spring ain't quite come so you can get back. But you know where you are, and your pa don't. Have you thought of that?"

"Yes."

"He don't know where you are. And whatever you've gone through, he's gone through a lot more. Remember that. He's gone through so much, he likely couldn't stand much more from you. You can't afford to take chances. You must be carefuler than any girl ever was before to cut down the percentage of punishment for your father. So if anything—mind you, anything at all you don't understand, comes up—you come to me about it. I've raised three girls, and I'll guarantee to see your side in any kind of a proposition you lay before me, and to advise you safe. Why—why—what's the matter?"

Sobs were shaking her and her hands fumbled at the parka hood to pull it up and cover her face.

"I hope your friend will find my dog," she says. "He was a good dog. Mrs. Johnson gave him to me."

She went out and across the way.

"Russ," I said when he comes back. "That's her house."

"There's only one house that way," Russ blazed at me. I've never been in at such a scene, but I imagine the accusing husband acts something like Russ did then.

"Yes," I said. "She lives there. She don't know why she's there, nor whose house it is, and it's up to us to keep her from finding out."

"I'll marry her," comes hot from Russ, "and kill that reptile——"

I catch my breath and look at Russ. It's been quick, but sure. Quick and sure! I wonder if that pretty little bundle of trouble across the way is worth all the fine things it's in Russ Williams to give. Then I see again the curve of her forehead and the look in her eyes that makes me think of Effie.

"Yes," I said. "You may kill that reptile, which would be good riddance, if it didn't get you into trouble. And you may marry her—sometime. But you'll go down to the States first and put on a collar and tie, regular. You'll go sit on her front porch and be looked over by her aunts and giggled at by her cousins. Then when you've talked to her pa, and completed the little hell on earth that no man is good enough for a woman without going through—then, if she's fool enough to give you a look in—you'll appreciate her and know how doggoned humble you ought to be before her all your life."

"Well, suggest something," Russ comes back. "She can't be left in Graham's trap. And we can't bring her over here in our one-room bunk-house."

"No," I said.

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"What are we going to do, then? Leave her to play out the game with the stacked deck that's been put over on her? Offend the purity that shines out of every feature of her by telling her about Graham——"

"No. It's queer though, ain't it, about that snow blowing up and keeping Graham away? And about her dog getting lost, and her coming to us?"

"God knows I appreciate the way luck's broken so far. But we can't lay down and leave a thing like this to luck."

"No," I says a third time. "We can't trust luck—but we can trust something better. Nor we ain't going to lay down. Because we can look out for the girl better with her away from the place she's in. But we're going to look out for her with eyes and hearts, and fists if necessary. Graham's being careful. Even he don't want another case like the little stenographer's entered against him. And he's scared of the LeRoy on his own account. She's crazy about him in a savage way that he don't know how to handle. So maybe it won't be so hard to manage for the month or two till the ice goes out and we send Mary McKay down to her pa."

Red comes up under Russ's brown skin.

"For a couple of two-fisted men, we've had the blamedest luck," he blurts out.

He means that our poke's too slim to buy a one-way passage for a squirrel that did his own running, let alone a girl that has to travel the best there is.

"That's the part we have to trust and rustle for," I said.

"We might sell the Willow Distant."

"We might."

I went to the window of beer-bottle ends that give us our light and view of the street and river outside. Something was going on in my head, but I couldn't get the hang of it, and I usually studied things out before the window. The water-hole down at the river had been covered by the blizzard, and three men were cutting a new one to the water that ran below. The ice came out rotten I could see—honeycombed and rotten. It wouldn't be long until it would go, piling and jamming, bumping and crashing, eighteen hundred miles of it northward to the sea. And behind it the way to the world would be left open.

"Yes. Maybe we could sell the Willow Distant," I thought out loud. "The commission would be enough——"

But Russ had gone. I sat down and tried to get the drift of the thing that was shaping in my thoughts. Maybe an hour had passed when I heard some one outside. It was Russ, but usually he made a rumpus that shook the place, kicking snow off against the step, swinging his arms, calling to me. Now he come quiet and quick.

"Lou LeRoy's over there," he stammered. "You're quieter and have better judgment than I. I came for you——"

"How do you know it's Lou LeRoy?"

"I heard her."

With that there came the fling of something against the door and Russ brought Mary McKay in out of the cold.

"She's there—the woman who owns the house!" the child cried.

"The woman who owns the house?"

"Yes. She saw smoke and notified the police some one had taken her house. They're coming for me—the police!"

"Police!" booms Russ. "She's not notifying police—not L——"

"Shut up!" I says to Russ. And then to her, "Go on Mary."

"She says she notified them before she saw me, because she supposed I was just a thief. But now that she's seen me, she says she will give me a chance to get away."

"How—get away?" I make my voice as steady and quiet as I can.

"She has friends starting for Circle City tonight—over the trail. She says Circle City is on the American side and I can't be arrested there by Canadian police."

So Lou LeRoy would throw the girl to the wolves of Circle!

"You stay here with Russ," I say. "I'll square things all around."

LOU LEROY looks some taken back when I come in and stand against the closed door.

"What do you want?" comes in her hard voice

"I want you to leave the girl alone."

"Mind your business!"

"I am minding my business—it's raising girls."

"You—you old——"

I looked down what she was going to say.

"Maybe if somebody'd raised you right," I go on.

"Cut it!" No cat ever looked more hate out of a pair of green eyes than Lou LeRoy looked then. "Cut it! I was raised right—

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don't you forget it! But you're not going to get me mushy over thinking of the saint that did her best by me. I'm not here to act soft—you know why I'm here."

"Yes," says I. "But I hate to see you make a mess of it—smart woman like you. You'll have this girl appealing to Graham first thing. Then where'll you be?"

"Graham won't touch her with a ten-foot pole when I'm through. That trip to Circle will about finish her."

"Word will get to Graham before she goes to Circle."

"Bah!" she thrusts her face out ugly. It was hard and white—dead looking—all but the eyes that blazed like windows with hell fires back of them. "Bah! You don't want Graham to get near the girl either."

"No. But if it comes to a draw between Circle and Graham——"

I left the suggestion in the air. She was quiet a minute, thoughts flying like bats across the fires of her eyes.

"Oh," she said after a while, as if she's seen a new angle of the case.

"I wouldn't pick Graham as the man for the girl," I continued. "And if you'll use sense I'll let you help me keep him away from her until the river opens and she can be sent to her folks in the States."

"Oh," she said again, and stood thinking.

"I love him," she broke out at last. "I love him! And in the end—it will be the river for mine! But not yet. I'm not ready for that yet!"

"How'd you like to get him away—off by himself with just you along—for a while?"

"How'd I like it! Gawd! But he wouldn't go." Her voice was a cry. All the love she bore the worthless whelp, all the jealousy that drove her and the despair that sickened her, was in it. "He wouldn't go!"

"Any man'll go to a new strike that's touted right. It ain't getting him to go that'd bother, but getting him to stay."

"I'd see that he stayed, all right! Once I got him by himself I'd watch."

The first pity I'd ever felt for Graham come to me then. It must be punishment enough for anything to be loved like that.

We are both still a minute, and then I asked—

"Do you know Jim Stone?"

She gives me a look that says, what do I take her for, thinking maybe she don't know Jim Stone. Everybody knows Jim Stone, and plays his luck. Let Jim's dog-team be found tied up back of the A. C. store of a night, and in fifteen minutes the news has spread and there are fifty more teams, tied, waiting for Jim Stone to take the lead to the new diggings he's started for. He holds the record for heading stampedes, and luck loves him like a baby.

"Could you get Jim Stone to go to Graham and recommend a claim?" is the next question I ask; it's what has been milling in my head all the time.

She turns away to the window and I see how her shoulders lift and drop with her breathing.

"Yes," she says after a while. "Yes, I can."

There's nothing more to say. I put my hand out to the door.

"Stone will be up to see you to-night," she speaks up kind of husky. "He'd better know something about the claim he's to recommend—where it is, at least."

"I have a map," I inform her. "The claim's got a pretty name—Willow Distant. And now, if you'll just go, so I can tell the young lady everything's been fixed and she's to stay——"

She began to bundle her furs around her, and by the time I was at my own door I heard her leaving the stenographer's house.

That was the way we made the riffle. I sold to Graham, through Stone, using Ole's power of attorney, and put fifty-five hundred in the bank in the name of Russ and me to be held there until the Swede come back. Five thousand was for Ole. The extra five hundred was tacked on for our commission, and it was salted down against the time Mary should need it for passage to the States.

THINGS went fine after that. Graham left town. Spring kept coming warmer and warmer. It got up to ten below, then zero, and we put off fur for sweaters. Birds come in the air, and along the river cliffs the martens' holes looked cozy and inhabited.

The snow showed it was on its last legs. Freezing got to be about the best the thermometer could do, and folks began to bet on the day the ice would go out of the river. Up one of the side creeks they was oiling up the engines of the *Sarah* and getting her ready to follow the ice out on the first trip to St. Michaels.

As for Russ and Mary—well, I have no pansy ink and bird's-quill pen to write

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things the way they were with Russ and Mary. She was making quite a shift at housekeeping for us, coming over in the morning and tidying up, cooking our beans, and now and then inventing a mince pie out of corned beef and raisins. Them was great days for Russ and me; and we bore up well under our looking-after.

So, as I say, things was going fine, for all that Mary's time with us was getting to be a matter of days instead of weeks. She was puttering around the house when this that I'm going to tell happened. I don't know what she was doing. She said it was Friday, and Friday was the day for an upset indoors. Russ'd gone out, and she was there, when suddenly the sun went out of the doorway and there stood Ole Swan.

"'Lo," I sung out. "Money for you at the bank."

He blinked and said. "Huh?" twice.

"Money," I explain, trying to make my English sound Swede. "Bank, fem toosen —Villow Distant."

He shook his great head.

"Yai change mind," comes out of him.

"You can't change mind. Sold—money —bank—sabe?"

"Yai change mind. Yai not sell."

Bigger'n a house, solider, thicker, no easier to handle, he hulked in the door, blinking and shaking his head.

"You sold already—forstay? Graham—Haines Graham—fem toosen like you say."

"Geeve it back," he singsongs.

Mary's frightened face was looking out of the shadows of the shack.

"Mary," I said. "Run along home."

I know that in about a minute I'm going to say words that ain't for her ears. She shrinks past the Swede and out the door.

"Now," I roars, eased of the strain of Mary's presence. "What the —— you mean? I've sold like you told me to. I've got the five thousand you wanted, and five hundred for my commission. I haven't a doubt the Willow Distant'd be dear at five cents, and if you want to be that honest you're welcome to give Graham back his five thousand. But you'll dig up the extra five hundred out of your own jeans, because I need it—sabe? There's a girl in this—a girl that has to have passage to the States. If it wasn't for that, I'd put your —— money down in the muck and rub your face in it, you pig-headed——"

"Yai pu-ush!" breaks in Ole Swan in a swelling bellow. I look, and there he stands, his great hands 'gainst my doorposts, his arms laxed but huge with strength. "Yai pu-ush—and your —— house fall. Yai not sell. Yai vant back Villow Distant!"

There are times when I don't think clear, and one of them is when I expect the doorposts of my house to part and the roof to come down on me.

"Yai go now. Tomorrow Yai come back." And Ole went off down the street, turning twice to look back as if he thought maybe he'd ought to do what he'd threatened after all.

When he was out of sight, Mary came slipping in.

"I stayed outside and listened," she gasped. "Oh, give the money back—get Mr. Graham to take it back. Please—please! Don't think of me. I'll stay and work for money of my own. But please—please get Mr. Graham to give the claim back. He's so big!"

It took a spell to quiet her, and I waited another spell for Russ to come. He was tracing the rumor of a new strike, and it was quite a chore. Anyway, he wasn't there when I see if I was going to get to the bank before closing-time, I'd better mosey. I laid to get that five hundred and salt it down safe in a sock under the floor. Time was getting too short to raise another stake before the *Sarah* sailed.

At the bank I couldn't get near the roll! That dumb Swede was sharp enough when it come to seeing his way clear to ball things up. He'd been to the Constable of Mounted Police and got a writ of attachment on our account. He'd figured on me taking out that five hundred which would leave him to make it up if Graham should consent to sell the claim back.

It sure put a crimp in things, and I hunted up Stone.

Jim stood chewing his lip after I told him.

"How can he get his claim back?" he said at last. "He sold. The power of attorney wasn't phoney, was it?"

Sure it wasn't phoney, and I said so, emphatic. But I told him how big Ole was.

"Graham'd be a fool to consider it, even if selling back wouldn't scramble things for the rest of us."

" 'Rest of us?' What do you mean?"

"I mean a company of us has bought the creek both ways from the Willow Distant. The claim's a mint."

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"That's what's eating Ole!" I said, understanding a little of the feelings of a dub who sees he's given away a million.

Jim Stone's eyes always make me think of buttons snugged down over something all-fired busy. If ever I wanted a scheme cooked up quick, I'd hire Jim by the minute to do my thinking.

"If the Swede gets his back the whole pack of first owners will be on the backs of the rest of us," he thinks out loud now. "I'll see the Swede."

I find something queer in the actions of Mary when I get home. Russ don't notice, of course. But Russ, the healthy, nerveless cub, he can't notice nothing about Mary but the way she holds her head and lays her hands together in her lap, et cetery. He's plum, dumb, clean daffy, like he ought to be. But me—I can see how queer and jumpy she acts.

"Betting is getting high down-town," Russ sings out to me.

"Betting?" Mary asks. "On what?"

"On when the ice will go. May eighth is the favorite date."

Then I don't know but what that great calf is going to cry. He looks at Mary.

"And that's only four days off," he says.

"Maybe I won't go," says Mary in a whispery voice.

"You'll go," I affirmed more to convince myself and Providence than for any other reason.

Then I give my attention to Mary's conduct. She acts like Effie would if she'd done something she knew I wouldn't like. I sit down by the window and try to think through the muddle of affairs.

It got to be ten o'clock. There was still plenty of light from the flat gray rays the sun laid across the up-stairs of the air. Mary and Russ were playing double solitaire at the table.

When it was eleven Mary got up to go and Russ took her to her door. Pretty sight it was I seen through the green glass window—Mary saying good night to Russ, and then Russ turning back to say good night to Mary. Pretty, and so durned sweet it made me homesick for days that had been gone for me thirty years almost, and for the smell of new grass in the fields and the chirp of birds dreaming in their nests.

At twelve Russ hove to, and I had the place alone to think in. I sat up most of that night and the next, watching for Stone, wondering, praying in a kind of fearful, hoping way.

The town got noisier as the time came closer for the ice to go. Bets were running high. Thousands were up on May eighth. Every sourdough and Indian that could accumulate enough hooch to make him prophesy, was petted like a prince.

Daytimes I tried to raise money. But all there was in town, it seemed like, was up on the ice, and it narrowed down to a matter of getting back that five hundred that Fate had handed out and then snatched away again.

Russ didn't enter into the thing like he ought. The one big fact he could see was that the money meant Mary's going, and he laid down on the job of rustling. I was all alone in my trouble.

THE night of the seventh I suddenly kind of let go of my worries and turned in for a night's sleep. Coming up flat against failure eases the mind like meeting up with success sometimes. It's as though the two ends of worry met. Anyway, I turned in.

The town was certainly whooping it up. I don't think there was a miner left on a creek outside. They'd all come in to see the ice go—all but Graham. A kind of admiration for Lou LeRoy come to me as the time went by and the city of Dawson was blessed by Haines Graham's absence.

This night I'm referring to Mary'd gone home early seeing how tuckered out I was.

"What's that?"

I'm so near done I jump like a woman at an extra loud shriek from down-town. Russ, who is at the window, turns.

"Only the crowd watching—regular swarm. Every time the ice cracks or groans they set the circular saw going through an oil-can down at LaDue's mill."

"Going down?"

"No. The less I see of the ice going out this year, the better I like it."

"The *Sarah* is ready to start as soon as the channel's clear," I kind of maunder along half asleep, and Russ don't answer.

The next I know the sun has switched to the other side of the house, and I know it's getting on toward morning. During the dark spell Russ must have lighted the lamp, for it's smoldering along and filling the place with smell. I get out of my bunk to fix it, and see that Russ isn't sleeping in

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his. Nobody can tell what a kid will do when he thinks he needs consoling, and I don't want Mary's last day with us spoiled. So I get up and start out to find Russ. You see, for all the discouraging aspect of things, something inside me somewheres, still contended Mary would be among those present when the *Sarah* began to churn up the Yukon in the first sailing of the year to St. Michaels.

Down-town sure was a pot of tea. Crazy! There ain't nothing—not a bunch of winners in a hundred-to-one shot, nor a million peewees circling around their nests and hollering—that's crazier than Dawson when the ice is due to move. Swinging, singing, surging—all in a mix—men, women, dogs and Indians all entering into a jubilee that's kind of solemn, it's so heart-felt. The ice going means letters from home, newspapers, old friends coming back, new friends just landed. No wonder folks get looney.

I waded through a snarl of dog-harness and friends, but I couldn't spot Russ, and started back home thinking maybe he'd come in while I was gone. Back of the A. C. store something whisked by me. I don't know what it was that told me, but I knew it was Lou LeRoy. I called and she slowed down till I caught up.

"She sent for him," she wheezed through her teeth. "I got it out of the man who brought the message. So I followed——"

Mary's actions when I returned from the bank that day come to my mind.

"When did she send for him?" I asked.

"I don't know when she sent, but the man came to the cabin yesterday morning. After he'd gone, Haines told me he was going to the Forks for letters he expected from Stone. He lied, and I knew it. So I caught up with the man who brought the message."

Yep—it had happened while I was gone down to the bank and before Russ got home. Mary had hunted up some musher who was headed for the creek and sent word to Graham. She thought she could get him to return the claim to Ole, and save me from the wrath of the Swede.

I stretched my stride to keep up with the scudding LeRoy.

"Get him away," I said. "The ice'll be gone in a day or two, maybe less, and the girl after it."

"You bet I'll get him away! But I've got to go to her place to do it. He's there now. That's your good girl for you! If I'd sent her to Circle in the first place——"

A new thought strikes through my noodle.

"If he's there," I says, "there's a six-foot chaperon in charge."

Mary's curtains were not up, and there was no sound in her house. Whatever was in progress was going on outside, and the girl was sleeping through it.

"Around back," I whispered to the LeRoy.

There we found them—the six-foot chaperon and the visitor mixing it for fair. Having no good in his soul to interpret for him, Graham had read his own meaning into Mary's call. According, he had crept along the river-front to the back of her house. Whether it was intuition or just plain moonstruck love that kept Russ at the window that night, I ain't prepared to say. Anyway, he was there when the snooping shadow began to prowl up toward Mary's door, and had swooped down on it. This was the way I figured things in the instant I saw the two figures swaying over the snow.

"Good boy, Russ," I whispered behind my teeth, and flung myself in.

For all the life he'd led, Graham was not flabby nor slow. He swung, carrying Russ with him, and I skidded to my knees while the battle changed places to a yard away. The snow melting had left the top of a pile of tin cans exposed. Each of the fighters was working his adversary toward it, straining for the position that would be on top when they fell across it.

It come to me what a fine thing it would be if Graham's purty face could be rubbed in that ragged heap until even a squaw would shudder when he leered at her. But Russ, Russ with his boyish eyes. . . .

They was edging toward it, hugging like they was tied by the sinews of their arms and legs.

I got my feet under me and crept along, figuring where I could lay hand to Graham and not damage Russ. Up toward the ugly pile they worked, each twisting at the big body of the other, trying to bend it—to wrench it around. The fight was too close to be a safe gamble. A rope, a tangle of wire under the snow, and down they could come with the best man underneath.

I grabbed at Graham just below the knees. There was a crash, a rattle of tin,

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the awful sound of whispered oaths. Some thing tore from my eye to my cheek. So I was underneath. It was my face ground against the tin! Well, I was no beauty to start with.

Then I heard breathing and caught the perfume of the LeRoy.

"You—you—" she was muttering. "You'd do that, would you! Well, I'll spoil your face for you. Tin cans would be beautifiers compared to what I'm going to do to you."

And the LeRoy's finger nails ripped from my cheek to chin again. I'd fallen far of the pair on the can pile, and true to type the she-tiger had turned on the one who was fighting her battle.

It wasn't easy to get her wrists, but I done it, and through the blood trickling from the nail ruts on my forehead, I looked her in the eye. I was faced away from the pair behind, but I could hear the grind of metal and the whizz of breath forced out of lungs.

The LeRoy struggled hard to shake off my hands.

"You'd do that to him? You'd spoil his face? I'll fix you for that. I'll——"

Then her crazy eyes went past me to the fighters beyond and her wrists stiffened like steel rods in my hands.

"Look!" she breathed in horror. "Look!"

"I can't look," I says, being on to her game.

"I'll turn." Her voice was still the same breathless whisper, scarcely more than the moving of her lips. "I'll turn, but look!"

We pivoted, me holding her wrists, she swinging until I was where I could see the others over her shoulder. Then I knew what she meant.

Russ was on top, his face deathly in the pale light. Under him Graham lay with one arm pinioned by his own body as if in falling he had tried to save himself. His back was bent to the cracking-point across the rise of tins; Russ's knees were on him, one hand fastened around his throat and the other steadily, forcing the distorted face beneath it toward the pile of tins.

When I seen it coming, I knew punishment like that should be in the hands of neither Russ nor me.

"Will you keep clear?" I asked the LeRoy.

Her lips formed—

"Yes."

I dropped her wrists and made for Russ. He struck at me with the hand that had been on Graham's face, and the shifting of his weight gave the man beneath leverage for struggle. I pulled and Russ fought at me, and the pinioned man writhed free and got to his knees.

"Let me at him!" came from Russ, and he broke the restraint of my arms like they was made of string.

"Now," he whispered hot and thick. "Now I'm coming at you," and he lunged toward the kneeling man in the snow.

How he heard it through the pound of the pulses at his temples I don't know, but he sure did catch the sound of Mary's door opening, and with the muscles of his face and neck rising and knotting like tortured things, he dropped his hands at his side and stood steady, to welcome the girl.

It was a queer company her eyes found outside her back door that May morning; Russ breathing like a bison, Graham crawling limply from his knees to his feet, me with my face gouged by the LeRoy, and that lady herself clinching her hands together before her, biting her lips till they showed white below the line of her teeth.

"I—I ran afoul of your can pile," I lied instantly. "This gentleman—" I pointed uncertainly at Graham— "is tuckered out from a hard trip down from the creek. And"—then I seen such an amazing possibility for another lie that the brilliance of it almost took my breath—"And—this being the lady who says she owns the house—she's going to move in now, and stay with you—right with you—till the *Sarah* sails."

"I—want to speak to Mr. Graham," Mary pleaded.

"Mr. Graham is on his way," cut in Russ.

"Oh," Mary attempted weakly. "But I must!"

"Mr. Graham's—on his—way!" repeated Russ. And the tone of his voice was sufficient to convince any one he knew what he said.

"Now," I said when Russ and me were alone in our shack, "maybe you'll get in and rustle for that girl's fare down."

"I'll find the Swede, and Stone," he said through his teeth, "if I have to——"

He didn't finish, for such a howl of whistles and throats and dogs tore loose down-town as shook the bottles in our window.

"She's busted!" I said. "She's moving. The *Sarah* will start as soon as the channel clears."

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But Russ was out the door and down the street before I'd finished. In an hour he come back with Jim Stone in tow.

"Found him at Flynn's," he explains the other's condition.

"Got the Swede," drools the subject of the information. "Say, if ever you want to sell a townsite to a Swede, get Jim Stone to make the deal. Regular devil among Swedes—sells them townsites."

"Townsites be ——!" from me. "Open the door Russ. Give him air."

"Took me two days to get him drunk," went on Stone, "but I did it—and he bought Stone City. Ever seen Stone City. Fines' rock-pile you ever see."

I turn away disgusted, wondering if maybe I can't stand off the man at the navigation office for a ticket. But Lord—a million people are crazy to pay real money for a chance at the first boat.

"'Ole,' I says," drivels Stone. " 'I'll sell you Stone City. Look at Dawson,' I says. 'Typhoid incubator! Look at Stone City—even a germ couldn't live at Stone City. Regular health resort. Nothing there for germs nor anything to live on. I'll sell you Stone City—you sell it off in town lots. Think of that! Chance of a lifetime.'"

"Get down to business," Russ yells. "How about our five hundred?"

"Wait a minute Russ," I says. "I didn't know you owned a townsite, Stone," to him.

"Di'n't," pleased as Puck was Stone. "Never saw the place but once—and then I thought —— big rock-pile. But I had to have something to sell to that Swede, di'n't I? Sure! Well, I sold him Stone City. 'What you got to pay for it with?' I asks him. 'Yai got fem toosen in bank,' he come back. 'All right, le's have it,' I says 'It's in oder fellow's name,' he says. 'Give me an order on him,' comes back I. 'It's got attachment on it,' he answers. 'All right—sign up papers,' and I produce them—he signs them—here they are!"

"Whoop!" howled Russ, and snow-dust flew up in his trail as he hit the street for the bank with the release in his hand.

Russ and me went down to see Mary off, and I don't think there was ever anything prettier than her and Russ standing together on the deck of the *Sarah* the day the river ran clear. Now and then she'd tear her eyes off Russ long enough to reach for my hand. Then the *Sarah* whistled and her wheel got to frothing like a bustle of lace, and all the things that happened that year before the ice went out, was over.

Oh, yes—about Stone City!

Just goes to show that a lucky man can't go wrong, even when he wants to. Swan didn't come back, and by and by Russ and me got to going around feeling easy in our minds, thinking maybe the Swede had expired on the bare rocks he'd paid five thousand for. Then one day when we was starting out, packing our kits on our back, thinking to meet up at last with the wild goose that laid the golden eggs, there come a long call from behind.

"Hi—you fellers!" it floated toward us.

We stopped in our tracks.

"Hi—you fellers!" again.

"Russ," I says, "unsling the picks and put them handy. That's Ole."

We get ready, turn together, and meet the surprise of our lives.

"Lu-uk!"

The Swede is wearing a smile the size and shape of a banana and, as he runs toward us, he is shoveling rocks out of his pockets into his hands.

"Lu-uk!"

Quartz! Quartz that had to be bent apart it was so close strung with gold.

"For fem toosen I get it—for fem toosen I buy Stone City!"

He sure had bought something. Looked to me like he had a million dollars in his hands. Nor that wasn't all.

He'd come for Russ and me. He felt grateful and friendly for the dirty deal we'd put over on him—and he wanted us in on the Stone City stakings before the stampede began.

Goes to show, as I said, that Jim Stone couldn't go wrong. Stone City has been a steady producer. Creeks have been worked out and benches have petered out, but Stone City keeps on sending down boatloads of rock, regularly.

Me and Effie have just come back from a trip to Hawaii, and we're visiting now at Russ's orange grove. Mary's gone to town in the big car. Usually she takes her own electric, but she had the children and their nurse along today. They're going to have their pictures taken—the children I mean.

Cute little beggars. One of them's named for me. Can you beat that?

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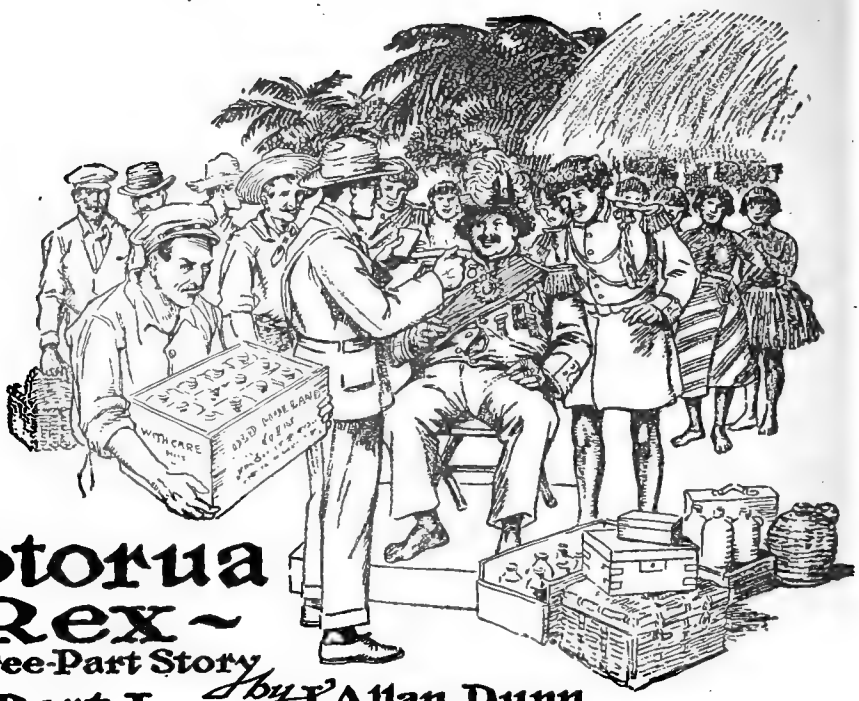

Rotorua ~Rex~

A Three-Part Story

Part I.

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Beyond the Rim," "The Hazard of the Hills," etc.

CHAPTER I

FOOT-LOOSE AND FREE

THE longer Vance Loudon stood on the stringpiece of the wharf, watching the loading of the schooner, the more the desire to go along gripped him. Faint odors of bygone copra and turtle-shell rose from the open hatch, slightly rancid but supremely fascinating—the essence of adventure.

The trading-vessel seemed a veritable galley of Ulysses, bound for the Lotus Islands, for mysterious beaches that beckoned to him, arousing visions already made enticing by a course of Defoe, of Stevenson, London, Beck and Osbourne plus an attack of ramble-fever that had brought him across the States to San Francisco, to Honolulu and, lately, to Samoa.

The lust for travel was a legitimate inheritance, if Vance had only known it. The last few generations had been stubbornly commercial, but there had been a Loudon who sailed with Drake and others before him who had followed wild hopes and broken new trails. The germ had persisted until it found fertile soil in Vance, foot-loose and fancy-free, twenty-seven, seventy-two inches in his socks, blessed with health and a vivid imagination.

His immediate ancestor had not been a startling success at the business that Vance felt no urge to carry on. When the assets and debits had been balanced, he had found himself the possessor of eight hundred and fifty-three dollars and twenty cents which he promptly decided to invest in a college education at the greatest of all universities—the world.

He followed the star of empire westward and, at Honolulu, the spell of the South Seas, singing siren songs amid the palms, whispering in the trade-winds of fairer islands, flower-laden, mountain-topped, where pearls lay in calm lagoons behind the creaming surfline, laid gentle, compelling hands upon his spirit. It was the lure of the unknown, and he listened.

He had a little more than half his patrimony left and now, it seemed almost providential, the Scotch skipper of the trading-schooner *Manawa*, bound for the

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Magdeburgs, had offered to take him as passenger for the trip.

"Ye'll not be lonely," Henderson had said. "There's three more who will be gangin wi' us. I'm not promising ye any certain itiner-r-rary, ye ken, but it should be verra interestin' and divertin'. I'll fix up the after cabin for ye an' tak' ye along for a matter of twa hundred dollars."

That would halve his present finances, but youth is proverbially a spendthrift. And who knew what chance might not throw in his way? The more he thought about it the more he wanted to go.

A native sailor straightened his back and grinned up at him.

"You like come along this *motu?*" (ship) he asked.

"*Hiki-no,* sure *kela,*" (Looks good to me) replied Vance, proud of the Polynesian he was rapidly acquiring, together with a vocabulary of beach English.

"Ha' ye made up your mind?" He wheeled to the voice of Captain Henderson who had come up behind him. "We're sailing wi' the ebb within an hour. I cleared sooner than I thought. My other passengers are comin' down right away."

Vance's money burned in his pockets. The odor of copra and shell that might have stayed a weaker stomach filled his nostrils.

"Two hundred dollars you said?"

The skipper's eyes, greenish and small and close together, blinked between rusty lashes.

"Twa hundred, on the nail. An' cheap at the price. Why man, we may be gone a matter o' four months, maybe five! 'Tis cheaper than living ashore, an' far more excitin'."

Vance brought out his roll.

CHAPTER II

A SCHOONER ARRIVES

THE rhythmic throbbing of the royal *katzenjammer* subsided as Rotorua stood in the private entrance to the throne-room surveying the assembled ministers of the Hapai Cabinet and, behind a railing at the end of the hall, the dusky, daily mob that bespoke his favor. Weeks of familiarity had not dulled his delight in the crimson carpet and hangings, the carven chairs on the dais, the fringed cushions that bore the golden monogram of the double R, all outward and visible signs of the sovereignty that was today invested with a prestige that made him feel every inch a king.

Measured cubically, Rotorua was the superior of any monarch upon earth. The royal height was six feet, two inches; the royal chest, relaxed, measured fifty-three inches; and the royal stomach, according to the record of the royal tailor, bettered that figure by another foot. The size of the royal head varied.

Until a week ago Rotorua had been a figurehead, an emblazoned dummy worked by the power behind the throne in the shape of the resident commissioner. Exactly seven days before, that elderly but efficient representative of Great Britian had issued his last order and met an untimely death from thermic fever, aggravated by his own fussiness.

Rotorua had not affected grief. The commissioner had handled the reins firmly, if wisely, and life for the king had been a constant fret against the curb. He had respected his controller, knowing the punitive might that backed him, but his royal regalia had smacked too much of harness for his ease. The commissioner had been buried with much wailing of women and flaring of torches and, later, quaffing of *kawa.* It had been a seven-days funeral, as befitted the rank of the deceased. Hence the royal headache.

But today, taking up the reins of government himself, Rotorua was his own man, master of Hapai and the Magdeburg Group. The gunboat patrol was not due for another five months. Magdeburg was off the beaten track. Perhaps a trader or two might call, picking up the commerce that was beginning to revive for the first time since the beginning of the Great War, but he, Rotorua Rex, was lord of the high and the low, master of the treasury and the taxes, of life and death, free to come and go, to dictate and pursue the royal whim until it died of exhaustion or ennui. All this was as it should be, as it would have been thirty-five years ago before the white man annexed Melanesia, for Rotorua was hereditary chieftain of the cluster of volcanic islets and coral atolls that made up his kingdom.

At the thought of it his brown face creased good-naturedly beneath its crop of hair, lime-faded to the hue and texture of

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oakum, the manifolds of his chin and neck straightened to a wabbly column with the lift of his head, and the floor creaked as he advanced toward his throne, a seat of fraternity lodge design, reinforced about the legs to support the royal obesity.

The ministers, according to their corporeal proportions, lounged or sat upright, their coppery faces aglow with pomp of place, clad in uniforms resplendent with aiguillettes and epaulets, with sashes and assorted medals and gleaming buttons and braid. As Rotorua seated himself upon the protesting throne their voluble chatter ceased and they came to attention while the crowd behind the railing shuffled in shoeless expectancy. Visions of long-forbidden feasts and dances were paramount in the minds of all.

Two *kahili* bearers, waving their exaggerated feather dusters, advanced to keep the kingly person free from flies. Rotorua loosened his tunic and with it much of his dignity, as a wedge of sleek brown skin appeared between the breadths of ultramarine broadcloth.

He gave a grunt of relief and clapped his hands. On the signal two loin-clad kanakas appeared, one with a calabash piled high with young coconuts clammy with moisture, the other carefully carrying two square-faced bottles of Hollands gin.

The ministers drooled and Rotorua smacked his lips. The native with the nuts deftly unstripped a husk, slashed the top from the cool green chalice and handed it to the king. Rotorua suspiciously examined the foil protector about the neck of a bottle and poured a generous amount of the potent liquor into the clear, slightly effervescing contents of the nut.

Every eye watched the palpitant throat while the royal countenance was obscured. Rotorua brought it down at last with an ecstatic sigh as the sutures of his skull seemed to knit more securely. He tossed the drained nut to the bearer and beamed with ginny geniality upon his cabinet while he undid another button. With sympathetic condescension he motioned to the servers and then, one cup ahead of his ministers, he joined them in their "mornin's mornin'," a Melanesian gin-ricky.

When the last drop had gurgled down the gaping gullets, Rotorua addressed himself to the envious crowd beyond the rail, making announcement of his present plans. There was to be a great feast winding up with a *souruka* dance, after which, accompanied by his suite, he would make a triumphal tour of his kingdom. Taxes, for the time being—until the treasury was exhausted—would be abolished, save for the customary tributes of food and service to the king and his chiefs.

The custom of "lights out" two hours after sunset he declared null and void. Work on roads and buildings was stopped pending the royal pleasure. The ridiculous rule regulating the size of fish to be caught was set aside. The calaboose would be thrown open; the members of the guard were no longer subject to the intolerant command of the British sergeant. He, Rotorua, was the word and the law! It was his heyday and his subjects' holiday.

Never was royal proclamation so pat to the people's pleasure. While the audience cheered and passed the word outside so that the acclamations resounded far down the beach, Rotorua, saturated as he was by public approval, plus alcohol, dimly realized that somewhere at the end of this glorious vista of independence there would come a day of reckoning. But that was five months off.

It was now early December, the dry season was now commencing, to last until May. Let the gunboat come with the rains! Five months of lotus-eating indulgence lay ahead. After that the deluge. So be it! He called for a third nut.

A door opened to the left with a glimpse of golden sunrays tangled in feathery palm leaves and a white man entered, uniformed in spotless drill, starched, immaculate, the chevrons of a sergeant upon his sleeve, striding like a machine to a position before the carpeted dais where he saluted with automatic precision.

Rotorua waved away his nut, blinked and fumbled with his buttons. From sheer force of habit the ministers straightened up and tried to hide their goblets.

The king gave up his buttons as a bad job and frowned. The sergeant was the fly in his ointment. Grizzled of head, wooden of face, keen and cold of eye, as impersonal as the bamboo cane he carried, he represented authority.

"Miss 'Argrave harsks a haudience."

Miss Hargrave was the daughter of the dead commissioner. Rotorua liked her in inverse ratio to his late fear of her father

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and his ever-present antipathy to her aunt, a militant widow who jarred his soul with her perpetual sniff of disapproval. He was going to be good to Miss Hargrave. For her sake he was even going to tolerate the widowed Mrs. Gower, though, beneath the veneer of civilization, already threatening to peel, his secret, savage soul would cheerfully have issued orders for her to be staked out at low tide to serve as free lunch for the sharks that came in to forage with the flood. Rotorua spoke English fairly well and he mustered his cloudy wits and achieved a hasty dignity.

"All-a-right. How soon bimeby she come?"

"Right horff." The sergeant's blunt Britannicism would not bend to the "your majesty." "There's a schooner houtside, 'eading hup for the 'arbor."

The natives behind the rail scurried from the audience-chamber like fallen leaves before the wind. Rotorua led the rush from the dais, sweeping the nut-bearer aside with an arm like the trunk of a tree.

A ship! Outside of the gunboat, none had called there for two weary years save a tramp freighter with a martinet of a skipper who refused shore leave and ignored Rotorua.

A trade-room! With gaudy prints and strings of beads, with sticks of tobacco and cans of succulent, smelly salmon!

A cabin! With an affable skipper opening up bottled beer; amber, alluring, alcoholic!

The coconuts rolled about the floor, footballs for the eager feet of the ministers. Within the minute the sergeant was left alone. He wiped his grizzly head with a bandana handkerchief, replaced the latter in the lining of his sun-helmet, tucked his cane under his arm and apostrophized the vacant throne out of the depths of colonial experience.

" 'Ell's a going to be popping 'ere before long. Plain 'ell hand plenty hof it, hor my nyme hain't Joe Bristol!"

CHAPTER III

HAWKS OF HAZARD

THE flaming tropic sun broke indignantly through the driving masses of trade-wind clouds and transformed the indigo hump of Hapai to a shot-silk dazzle of emerald spurs and amethystine gulches, with high rocky headlands rising clear from the sea. Over all one naked peak showed like an unsheathed talon, tangled in a rending veil of mist.

The four passengers of the trading-schooner *Manawa* looked at the sudden splendor with varying emotions. Vance Loudon, in the bows, steadying himself to the pitch of the vessel by the forestays, gazed with the eyes of the enthusiast; the three in the shadow of the close-hauled mainsail surveyed the island with the eyes of a hawk for the gold-mailed pheasant in the covert.

Hawks they were—hawks of hazard. And Hapai was the lure that had brought them across the wind-tossed leagues. Rich in sandalwood and ebony, pearl and tortoise-shell, copra and *bêche-de-mer;* the Magdeburg group was now under a joint protectorate of Great Britain and France, pending ultimate division, since the allied cruisers had chased the Germans from the Pacific and, with three seasons' harvests of forest and lagoon, was open to commerce for the first time since the installation of the dual government. It was the hope of the captain of the *Manawa* to be the first vessel to arrive since the embargo had been lifted.

The trio, a hard-bitten lot, faces accentuated by grim lines about the mouth, noses like beaks between eyes cold as crystal though far less transparent, were adventurers of the true Websterian standard, a combination of definitions *c* and *d*—"one who engages in enterprises of trade, travel etc. for profit; especially in foreign countries, by playing upon the credulity and prejudices of others."

Jim Edler, bulky, blue-muzzled, was openly after a sandalwood concession with Phil Griffin, colloquially known as "Red," a pock-marked, noisy individual, bow-legged, with a flare of aggressive pompadour like a rooster's comb. A timber deal in Oregon in which they had bought once, on notes, and sold twice, for cash, had temporarily exiled them from the States. Louis Brewster, better known as "Bluff," lean, cynical, predacious, said nothing of his business, but his well-kept, supple hands proclaimed that his wits rather than his muscles supplied his needs.

As the bows of the *Manawa* lifted dripping from the brine, flushing a covey of

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flying fish already harried by a school of dolphin, Loudon caught sight of the warehouses and bungalows of the German occupation clustered on the beach, the tin roofs flashing above the glare of the coral-block walls.

A big canoe shot suddenly across the placid jade of the harbor, its progress marked by the white spurts of vigorous paddle strokes. At the reef-opening a sail was hoisted and the craft sped toward the schooner before the brisk urge of the land breeze.

Captain Henderson took his binoculars from their hook at the head of the companionway and joined the group by the mainsail.

"That's funny," he said. "It's Rotorua's war-canoe. Where's the commissioner's launch? Look at that flag, will ye?"

The scarlet ensign of England was jerking halfway up the staff in front of the Commerce Hall, occupied by Rotorua as his palace and executive building. A group of excited natives swirled at the foot of the pole. Suddenly a tall spare figure in black broke through the mob, seized the halyards and raised the flag to the truck. It was a woman!

Henderson snapped an order. The wheel-spokes spun, the jibs fluttered, the *Manawa* came into the wind and hung there as the canoe came dancing over the crisp crests.

The canoe was fully sixty feet long with high, carven prow and stern inset with mother-of-pearl. A platform was built between hull and outrigger. On it lolled a barbaric figure in bright blue broadcloth and gold lace, the effect of the uniform somewhat marred by the bare feet of its owner. The skipper lowered his glasses.

"They ain't armed," he announced. "But there's something wrang. That is Toruki, the king's nephey, heir to the throne, ye ken, for Rotorua has no bairns for all his score o' wives. He's grand cockamalorum o' the what-ye-may-call-it and quite a per-r-sonage, is Toruki."

The matting sail was dropped and furled, the natives took up their paddles and the canoe surged alongside, rising and falling like a cork as the grinning kanakas dexterously kept it in position.

"Hello, Toruki, *tarofa nui*."

The chief echoed the skipper's greeting none too cordially, Loudon imagined. Stripped of his uniform, given a bark-cloth loin-wrap and a bundle of spears, he would have been a sinister-looking savage. His Papuan face was a mask of rapacity, his smile more suggestive of forbidden feasts than friendship.

"Come aboard, Toruki. Mac, break out some liquor. Tomi, man the gangway. We'll keep the rest of them off ship till we ken how matters stand."

The supercargo dived below. Tomi, the Malayan boatswain, hustled his aides to the rail. Toruki stepped lightly from the rocking craft to the gangway and, following the skipper's gesture, padded down the companionway, bending his frizzled mop to clear the cabin combing.

The trio trailed after Henderson. Loudon stayed on deck. He had little in common with the rest save the run of the smelly schooner. To Henderson, he was a passenger who had liberally overpaid for his grimy cabin; to the three adventurers he was of little interest since he obstinately refused to be parted from his money after one little friendly game of poker that Brewster had suggested.

He looked down at the grimacing Melanesians who gazed with friendly curiosity at their own antithesis, a man, blue-eyed and tawny-haired, his face tanned to dark amber yet preeminently a white man, broad-shouldered and narrow-hipped, type of the dominant race that by virtue of some strange leaven reaped the fruit of their labors and commanded them at will. The one was a man who thought, the others lived by instinct, sating their prime desires of sex and stomach.

Loudon tossed down a package of cigarets. The white tubes passed from mouth to mouth, incongruous luxuries of civilization in the copper-colored, loose-featured faces. Twenty puffs of exhaled smoke filmed blue in the breeze.

The cabin skylight was raised for coolness and a babble of bevoweled Melanesian floated out. The chief knew no English. Henderson translated. Loudon moved over to the skylight.

"The commissioner's dead of sunstroke. That ought to open things up a bit."

A pause followed marked with the *cluck* of withdrawn corks and the clink of glasses. Then Toruki spoke again, his tongue loosened by the liquor.

"What's he cackling about?" rasped Griffin.

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The skipper's voice held chagrin.

"He says that a tramp freighter bought up the stuff on hand, all except this season's copra an' that'll no' be dried for a while yet. That's the devil o' it wi' these steam craft drivin' us out o' the trade. That mak's it bad, ye ken. I'll ha' to be goin' elsewhere for a cargo. I'll no be able to stop here as we planned. I can leave ye all here, if ye like, but I canna say wi' ony certainty when I'll be back for ye."

"You promised us you'd wait over for a week while we put through our deal."

"I told ye, Mr. Edler, that I'd wait whiles the schooner was loadin'. Ye canna expec' me to lose the chance of a cargo. The freighter may ha' cleaned up most 'o the Solomons. I've got to be hustling. I'm no runnin' the *Manawa* for the sake o' my health, ye ken."

Edler and Griffin started a grumbling protest against the skipper's adamant decision.

"Hold on," said Brewster's unemotional tones. "Henderson's within his rights. He's not cruising for pleasure like our young dude friend in the after cabin."

Loudon smiled as he heard himself projected into the talk. He sensed the basis of Brewster's rancor in his own disinclination to raise the limit.

"Now we're none of us out for our health. Cash, I take it, is our long suit. Ask Toruki if the freighter paid for the cargo—and how?"

"Yes," announced Henderson after the rapid-fire interchange. "Turoki says it was a big lot, an' the Beretania Topman—that's the commissioner, ye ken—took the money in gold an' notes. Something between nine an' ten thousand pounds."

"Much good that does us," growled Griffin.

"Hold hard, Red," said his partner. "Let Brewster finish. He's got something up his sleeve."

Loudon bent for better hearing. The native crew was busy gossiping with the canoemen. There was a tension in Brewster's voice that suggested something afoot. As a creature of the gambler's mentality, thought Loudon, it was bound to be of the Frankenstein species.

"Ask him where the money is now."

Henderson's voice took on a feverish quality. The trip had given Loudon a fair idea of the skipper's supreme regard for profit. The man was on a par with the Hawks, absolutely unscrupulous.

"Man, but you're canny," he said admiringly. "I'm thinkin' I see your drift."

He quizzed Toruki, plying him with more liquor.

"It was paid to the Treasurer. That's Mauohi. He's but a figurehead. The cash is in the commissioner's safe."

There was a pregnant pause. Some one set a glass down heavily.

"——! Brewster, you've got it!"

"There's a lassie, Turoki says. A beauty. They call her *Ta-Rau-Rani*, Leaf of Heaven. And her aunt, a widow lady. She'll be the one that hauled up yon flag. Then there's a sergeant. But there's no guard—they were all natives and they've deserted. There'll be the gunboat, the *Leopard*, but she's not due for months."

"Any cable or wireless?" asked Brewster.

"No cable. They've started a wireless outfit but it's not complete. None nearer than New Mecklenburg, seventy miles south. But we must go easy. Rotorua's loyal, ye ken."

Brewster had a laugh that Loudon particularly disliked. It was invariably used when a sneer was intended.

"The trouble with you folks is that you lack imagination," he said. "There should be no trouble. Here is a young lady suddenly bereaved, her father buried in the coral on a lonely island. The sergeant can not be given the responsibility of this money. No doubt the young lady feels that it rests upon her shoulders and I presume she is the custodian. Rotorua may be loyal but he is a savage at heart—and he's loose. It would be a kindly and no doubt a well appreciated thing to offer the lady and her aunt the opportunity of removing these funds to a more secure place, and an additional factor would be the opportunity of Christian burial for her father's body."

Griffin gave a raucous chuckle. Loudon's fists balled as he realized the diabolical ingenuity of the plot to get the two women aboard the *Manawa* with the fifty thousand dollars, leaving the sergeant behind to represent British authority until the gunboat came, five months too late. The mention of his own name recalled him to attention. Edler was speaking.

"How about young Loudon?"

"I have thought of that. He can keep

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the sergeant company. He need not know the *Manawa* is not staying over. Get him off on a hunting trip. There should be plenty of ways to handle him. If he interferes——"

Loudon could imagine the shrug that accompanied the broken sentence.

"Where is he now?" asked Edler. "That skylight's open."

Loudon slipped noiselessly to the rail on his rubber soles. Some one mounted the transom and closed the skylight. The fox-face of the Scotch skipper appeared above the companionway, the look of suspicion dying out of his eyes as he saw Loudon trying to swap a pocket-knife for the shell necklace of one of the paddlers. He called overside to the canoe, then gave an order to the helmsman.

The schooner came up into the wind, heeled filled to the breeze and headed for the harbor as the canoe sheered away and followed, paddling hard against the breeze.

Loudon stayed on deck, his blood steaming at the thought of the plot planned with such devilish ingenuity. The girl and her aunt would be hoodwinked with the ghastly bait of a proper interment for father and brother and a return to civilization with the money. Once at sea, he could imagine the rest. The loot divided among the four scoundrels with five months in which to disappear, the two gentlewomen marooned on a desert isle as the happiest fate that might await them. He felt the keen prick of impending adventure; the challenge to his chivalry and his spirit rose to the spur.

After all, he held the winning hand. All he had to do was to seem unconscious of the plot and warn the two women. *Ta-Rau-Rani*, Leaf-of-Heaven! He wondered what she was like. He was twenty-eight and this was his first glimpse of the selvage edge of life in which he was to be involved. He silently apostrophized Brewster.

"The joker's the high card in this game, my slick-fingered acquaintance. And I hold it!"

CHAPTER IV

LOUDON TALKS TO THE SERGEANT

VANCE LOUDON was ninety-five per cent. man. The balance—call it femininity if you will—redeemed him from the hundred per cent. of masculinity which means brute, is apt to include selfishness and exclude tenderness and generosity.

Almost any one would have given Loudon a high rating on sight. It was an oversight of Brewster, keen judge of human nature that he was by profession, that he underestimated Loudon partly because the latter was particular about his appearance, partly because he spent a lot of his time reading the books he had brought with him and principally because the gambler had not taken proper account of Loudon's eyes, which were frank and absolutely fearless. Frankness, to Brewster, was a sign of verdancy and that, in turn, a symbol of weakness.

Loudon was cleanly modeled, not molded. Too many of us look as if we had been indifferently well cast from an abused original, some of us show too prominently the ridges where the molds joined. We may be all right behind our corpulence or our leanness, or whatever it is spoils us from the artistic standpoint, but the well-built man has the edge.

Loudon had not proved up his percentage yet. Opportunity had not come his way. He was not certain how he would act under circumstances that were at once exciting and hazardous, but he thrilled at the thought of them in the confidence born of good unabused health toed up with a certain bulldoggedness of purpose that had already proved of good stead to him in minor matters.

School, college, two uneventful, dragging years in which he had tried to interest himself in some business or profession that held a distinct call for his energies, had ended in his little patrimony, a golden key to unlock the gate of Adventure. Youth, red-blooded, normal youth, finds life a long, long corridor, lined with doors to be opened, and now Loudon held the handle of the first one to the right.

On deck the kanakas were breaking out the cases of liquor and bales of goods that were to make up the skipper's gift to Rotorua in return for the chickens, young pigs, fruits and vegetables that had been brought off to them in a friendly flotilla of canoes long before the anchor cable had rattled out. Evidently the king expected to get the better of the exchange. He received tribute in return for favors and the chickens and fruit he gave were not his own

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property but rather an outflow of the hospitality of his subjects.

Loudon overheard Edler speaking to Griffin about their own presents to the monarch and decided to overhaul his baggage for something suitable. If he was going to espouse the cause of the two women it would be as well to get in favor with the king. Not to make him an offering in the face of the others' gifts would be equivalent to an insult.

The only thing he could find that seemed in any way adequate was a hunting-ax, a shining thing of steel and nickel, fitted in a sheath of russet leather and attached to a long shoulder-strap. It was well made and practical though light. It might take the royal fancy, he decided, and slipped it on beneath his linen tunic.

The royal group awaited them in front of the palace on a strip of close-clipped emerald turf. The chief Toruki escorted them, showing no sign of his liberal potations save a bloodshot eye and an occasional sucking in of his cheeks as if some of the joyous alcohol still clung to his mucous membranes.

Loudon looked vainly for any sight of the women. A ramrod of a man in white drill stood by the flagstaff, guarding the British ensign, and Vance resolved to get in touch with the ladies through the sergeant. Meanwhile he found himself closely escorted by the three Hawks and Henderson, with the supercargo in the rear, directing the bringing up of the gifts upon which Rotorua was already gazing covetously and expectantly.

Back of the king and his councilors was grouped the female entourage of the court, arrayed effectively and wonderfully in striped garments that suggested the contents of candy-store jars. Skipper Henderson addressed royalty with the ease of one accustomed to dealing with the island aristocracies, presenting his passengers.

The two partners had evidently given care to the matter of gifts as an easement for the introduction of their sandalwood concession and Rotorua grinned appreciatively as Edler offered him the cocked headgear of a Knight Templar, together with a collection of badges and ribbons heavy with gold fringe, announcing the delegacies of a score of conventions in as many cities.

The king proudly perched the hat upon his tawny frizz, the long white plume tickling the royal proboscis, an annoyance fully offset by his vanity and the effect produced upon the dusky sirens in the rear. He jabbed his fingers and thumbs as he pinned on the badges in uneven lines upon his coat and beamed as he fastened the last one in place.

Next came Griffin bearing two boxes covered with imitation leather and lined with white plush wherein reposed two dozen rings. Phony diamonds of rainbow lusters, too good to be true, blazed from settings of gilded base metal. Dazzling as were the broken rays of light that darted from them, Rotorua's eyes outmatched them. Griffin had picked big sizes and they slipped easily over the royal fingers, the royal thumbs, one to each digit, then two, stretching the royal fingers too far apart for comfort.

A crease came upon the monarch's brow. He sighed as he removed some of the hoops, then smiled again as he stooped over with some effort and decorated such of his toes as would accommodate the rings. Still there were several left over. He called up the dusky dames who claimed him as husband as well as liege lord and solemnly presented each with a ring. Instantly the ladies strutted to one side as those set apart, twisting the imitation gems about to see them flash, the while they watched the generous pouts of their less fortunate sisters.

Loudon was hard put to it to preserve a straight face as he watched Rotorua and his harem peacocking. The song came irresistibly to his mind,

> He's got rings on his fingers, bells on his toes,
> Elephants to ride upon, everywhere he goes.

But the wily Griffin was not yet through. From a grip he produced bolt after bolt of cheap, wide, satin-faced ribbon of all the primary and secondary hues. These he distributed to the women impartially amid their "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" of gasping admiration. They twined themselves with it, paper backing and all, and paraded like a lot of human May-poles after the dance.

Loudon began to experience doubt as to the propriety of his own gift. Once, when he was a small boy, he had gone to a children's party and found that it was a birthday festival and gifts galore were being received while he had none, until he ran pantingly home and explained the situation to his mother who redeemed the day with a

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hasty selection. But he had never forgotten the first horror of inadequacy and now it repeated itself. But he took heart as he reflected that gifts went by rarity rather than price in those latitudes.

BREWSTER had an offering that Loudon shrewdly suspected was an invariable selection. Enshrined within a polished box, poker chips in red, white, blue and yellow and brown were nested about decks of playing cards. Rotorua knew their uses. He shot one look at Brewster that held a twinkle.

"Eyah! Poker! That very nice present. Bimeby we play." His eyes swept the group of white men.

Brewster nodded in the affirmative, followed by Edler and Griffin. The skipper shook his head.

"I dinna ken the use o' the cards," he said. "'Tis no' on scruples, but I'm a wee superstitious."

"Superstitious of what?" rallied Brewster.

"I ha' a presentiment that I should no' be so successfu' wi' any other trade than my ain," said Henderson drily.

Rotorua shot out a fat forefinger, bediamonded, at Loudon.

"You?" he asked, ignoring the supercargo who was overseeing the opening of cases of round and square bottles of golden and white liquor.

Brewster looked at Loudon with his smiling sneer as the latter nodded.

"Good," said the king. "*Maitai no!* Verigood! One-two-three-four-five-we play. Allaright, tomorrow I think. Not tonight." His rolling eyes proclaimed that "tonight" was to be set apart for the consumption of liquors long denied under the austerity of the commissioner.

"Tomorrow," he went on, "we have big *souruka* dance, we have big feast, oh verifine *luaua* we eat. Then we play poker."

Loudon took the little ax from under his coat, slid the shining steel blade from its leather sheath and proffered it to the king. All doubt as to its reception vanished. The childish light that had alternated with gluttony in Rotorua's orbs vanished. For the moment a different man sat there as he balanced the light, strong weapon, ran his thumb appreciatively over the keen edge, put the ax back into its sheath and looked approvingly at Loudon. This was a warrior, not a comic-opera monarch.

"Eyah!" he said patting the ax before he slipped it over his massive shoulder above the tawdry badges. "*Maitai no!* A man's gift. *Maholo.* (I thank you.) Now then, what you-all want? Eh?"

His eyes were shrewd enough now and Loudon registered the thought that Rotorua was nobody's fool save his own.

"I? Nothing, king. Perhaps I should like to shoot a little."

"Good. You not trader? Eh? You like see thing? Bimeby I go along all my place in big *motu* (canoe). Maybe you think you like, you come."

"I should like to," said Loudon.

The suggestion of shooting gave him the opportunity to get his rifle and shotgun ashore. That the Hawks would resent his interference with their plans, was certain. That they already half suspected him, seemed probable from their actions. The open skylight had made them wary.

As Edler and Griffin started to outline their ideas on a sandalwood concession, still the ostensible reason for their trip, he wandered away toward the sergeant by the flagstaff. Brewster was jollying the ribbon-bedecked ladies, Henderson was helping his supercargo properly display the bottles so that Rotorua should not fail to observe the prodigal magnificence of the donation.

Loudon halted by the flagstaff and offered the sergeant a cigar. The man took it with a wise appraisal of shape and color and band, took off his helmet and carefully placed the cigar above his bandana.

"Carn't smoke hit now, sir. Hon duty, sir. Much hobliged to you just the syme, sir. Yes, sir, thank you sir. Hamerican, hain't you, sir?"

"Yes. Look here, sergeant," he spoke quickly. The rugged frankness of the soldier's face determined him to crisp matters. "I want to see the two ladies—on a matter of great importance to them—I want to see them as soon as possible and alone. I've got to see them before certain other members of our party. Do you get me?"

Sergeant Bristol's eyes, the only things about him that did not seem to act automatically, challenged those of Loudon before they roved away to inspect the remainder of the landing party.

"Meanin' Miss 'Argrave and 'er Haunt, Mrs. Gower? Hi don't know, sir. They're hin retirement, sir, account hof the death

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hof the young lydy's father. Hit 'ud 'ave to be something very himportant, sir."

"It is. I said so. I'm not trying to annoy them, man."

"I know that, sir. I can tell a gentleman when I see one. I take it you hain't hover and habove friendly with the rest of the party, sir?"

"I am not. But there's no time to explain things now. I'm asking you to do the ladies a service, sergeant."

"I harsked the question, sir, becos there's two of 'em mooching hover hour way. The 'ouse is third from the palace, back of me. 'Ibiscus 'edge back of the stone wall hin front, sir. You carn't miss it. But they won't be likely to see you this hevening." The pupils of his eyes contracted. "Hi'll mention hit to them. Talk to me about something helse, sir."

Loudon was swift to take the hint before the shadow of Brewster projected itself between him and the sergeant.

"How about wild pigs, sergeant? Isn't there any game outside of the birds?"

"Pigs by the 'undreds, sir. Yes, sir. Back in the 'ills."

Griffin had padded up behind Brewster. Loudon had his back to them. The sergeant's inscrutable face deserved decoration with more cigars, he thought, before he turned to meet his fellow passengers.

"Any idea how long Henderson is going to stay over?" he asked, trying to emulate a sportsman's enthusiasm. "Looks like a fine place for hunting. And I'd like to make that trip with the king."

"Better ask him yourself," suggested Brewster. "Several days, I think. He told me to tell you that we are all going aboard. Old Trulyrural wants to be left alone with the liquor and the skipper thinks we had better not mix in with it. It isn't the custom."

"All right," said Loudon easily.

He became aware that he was under espionage. The fact was made more evident as the two closely escorted him down to the boat. They will try and see the ladies tonight, he thought. And the sergeant won't let them. I've got to slip off somehow.

"I'll put in the time overhauling my guns," he said aloud. "There are parrots and doves and some birds-of-paradise they tell me."

He was carrying it off well. Brewster and Griffin exchanged a look that held contempt for his ideas of sport and the ease with which he fell in line with their plans. Once get him away on a hunting trip and the rest would be easy. They joined the others and went aboard the schooner. Native canoes were all about it, bringing off the return gift of the king. Coconuts, bananas, chickens, yams and pigs were already piled up on the deck.

"No one ashore tonight, Tomi," ordered Henderson. "I don't want the men gettin' mixed up wi' the islanders. They've got to keep sober and the best way to do that is to keep them aboard."

Tomi blinked. The order was not to his liking but Henderson was not a pleasant man to cross.

Dusk fell like a curtain. When Loudon came on deck after supper the turreted peaks were dark purple against a sky of ebony. Lights twinkled in the murk of the shoreside palms. The palace blazed. Along the beach coconut fires burned red. The sky was thickly jeweled with stars.

Miss Hargrave, he thought. And the aunt's name Mrs. Gower. I wonder what her first name is?

"Pretty place, isn't it," said the gambler. "Have you got a light?"

He strolled up and down beside Loudon until the latter got sick of it and went to his cabin. This occupied the stern of the vessel. A big window overlooked the rudder, made large for traderoom purposes before Henderson had moved the shop amidships and converted the space into a cabin for his high-paying passenger.

Loudon lit his lamp and took his guns from their cases. He spent the best part of an hour examining them. In the main cabin he could hear the voices of the Hawks and Henderson and the clink of bottle and glasses. They were speaking too low for him to distinguish words. He looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock. The ladies would soon be retiring. If he was to see them that night he would have to be starting.

He got up and softly tried the handle of his cabin. It turned but the door resisted his push. It had been locked from the outside. He remembered having noticed staples in door and jamb. Some one had silently snapped a padlock over them. They were taking no chances. He was a prisoner.

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CHAPTER V

HELEN HARGRAVE

A JOLT stiffens the right kind of man. It is the tap of the hammer that finds the flaw or passes the perfect. Loudon's chin lifted and his jaw angled outward as he stepped back softly from the door. If those chaps meant business he would get busy too.

It was four against one, not counting the supercargo, Tomi and the native crew. The game was on. He found himself glowing with excitement yet conscious that his brain was cool. The bulldog in him prompted one thing at a time and hanging to that until it was accomplished. And that thing was to get ashore and warn Miss Hargrave and Mrs. Gower.

He was dressed in white flannels and a silk shirt. He would be wet when he arrived, yet he decided not to remove his tie. He changed his shoes for light sandals he had bought at Samoa for bathing where coral was plentiful. He was in no mind to be handicapped by a limp. He soaked his automatic in vaseline, greasing the holster before he fastened it and attached it to his belt.

As he glanced out of the stern window which was to see his exit, he saw the breakers creaming on the reef and the thought of a shark arose. But he dismissed it with a firmer set of his jaw. It was ebb tide and the chances were in his favor. Anyway he wouldn't think about them once he started. He took a hunting knife and sheath and greased them too. Then he took the heavy straps off his cabin trunk and kitbag and buckled them together. He eased up the heavy metal catch of the window and opened it. The roar of the surf poured into the cabin. He tested the catch and fastened one end of his impromptu rope.

Tiptoeing to the door, he locked it on his side, returned to the casement and let himself out and down into the warm water of the lagoon.

It was half a mile or more to the shore but the distance meant nothing to his powers of swimming. What he dreaded most was that the streaks of phosphorescence he left in his wake should be seen from deck. He swam under the surface until his lungs threatened to burst, and came up a hundred yards from the schooner, shaping his course to the right of the palace and the scarlet flares of cocohusks where the islanders were carousing and chanting drunken *meles*.

The water was placid and sown thick with star reflections. Although the ebb was against Loudon he swam steadily on. Suddenly he paused. Half-way between him and the beach he saw a splash of liquid fire and, beneath it, something arched, like the back fin of a shark.

His heartbeats quickened as he trod water, then settled to normal as he saw that the object was the upthrown arm of a swimmer, probably one of the natives freshening up after his potations. Thrice he let his legs droop before he struck bottom. He crawled out on all fours, keeping that position until he reached the covert of pandanus scrub that grew where the strand leveled.

"The third house on the right."

Palms and breadfruit grew thickly and he hurried along in their deserted shadow thankful for the lack of a moon. The wall of coral loomed up gray beside him backed by the glossy hedge of flowering hibiscus, pierced midway by an opening barred by a gate. A light poured between the slats of outside blinds and striped the lawn. Suddenly a figure stepped out and confronted him.

"Who goes there?"

It was the sergeant. Starlight wandering through the overhead tangle flickered on the bayonet fixed to the end of his rifle.

"A friend," said Loudon, remembering the formula.

The bayonet remained steady, then advanced.

"Ho, hit's you his hit, sir? I thought you might be coming hoff. Swum for hit, I see. I 'ave to do sentry-go myself. My company's deserted—drunk by this time, the beggars. I spoke to the ladies but I don't think they'll see you."

"They've got to," said Loudon. "This is no pleasure trip, my man."

A door opened and a parallelogram of light flooded the path and showed the dripping figure of Loudon parleying with the vigilant sergeant.

"What is it, Bristol?" asked a sharp, high-pitched voice, acid with suspicion.

"Hit's the Hamerican gent, mum. Swum ashore to see you."

There was a moment's parley at the door

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wherein a smoother, younger voice held place.

"Bring him in, Bristol," said the first speaker.

The door opened directly into a big room floored with matting and rugs here and there. It was set with teakwood and bamboo furniture, the walls hung with Oriental weaves. A shaded lamp stood on a small table beside a grand piano. A girl had retreated to the instrument and stood with her hands and forearms resting on the rosewood, her slight figure, clad in filmy black that revealed neck and arms, leaning lightly against the case. She regarded with an air half curious, half amused, the diffident pose of Loudon, very conscious of his drenched attire and the disapproving sniff of her aunt.

He saw an ivory oval of face where scarlet lips showed vivid, eyes whose color he could not determine and a mass of pale gold hair banded above a well-shaped forehead. Then he looked at Mrs. Gower—gaunt, uncompromising, sniffy and angular. Her elbows were bony, she had knobs on her forehead and her nose was of the grosbeak variety. Her eyes, he decided, were the hue of dishwater. She was not prepossessing and her manner made him feel like a derelict waif brought up before the matron of an orphanage.

"To what reason are we indebted for this [sniff] unusual visit?"

Loudon's sense of humor came to his relief. After all he was doing this austere, aristocratic antiquity a favor and the girl's face held encouragement.

"Madam," he said with a bow that was received with some show of thaw, "I have just dropped in, literally—" he spread wide his soaked arms—"to inform you of a plot that has been made against you and against the property of the British Government, of which I understand, you and your niece are now the representatives."

"A plot?" The girl came forward. "And against the Government? Won't you sit down?"

"I think not," said Vance. "I am an animated puddle-producer, a walking fountain. If you ladies will be seated I will tell you all that I know."

"Our servants have all gone to the beach," said the girl. "You must let me get you something—a glass of sherry?"

Mrs. Gower sniffed again as her niece brought the wine but she condescended to seat herself and listen uncompromisingly to the beginning of Loudon's tale. As he proceeded she punctuated the tale with more sniffs of apparent indignation but relaxed sufficiently to thank him at his conclusion.

"In the name of His Majesty's Government we thank you," she said. "It seems preposterous that such a thing should be attempted and yet anything might happen on this heathen island from cannibalism to—to—catastrophe. I warned my late, lamented brother that a stronger force was needed but he was stubborn to the last. A mustard plaster would have saved him, I firmly believe——"

"Mr. Loudon is not interested in our family details, aunt," said the girl with a firmness that was a refined echo of her aunt's imperiousness. "We are indeed very grateful and we shall assuredly decline any offer to sail upon the schooner. As my father's daughter I am the direct representative of Government interests and, while we might have entertained such a proposition before your timely warning, I shall now stay until the gunboat arrives. There are many interests to be protected. Rotorua is loyal. We shall be able to look out for ourselves. Thank you."

She rose and held out a slim, firm, almost boyish hand to Loudon who took it.

"I think we shall be here for a few days," he said. "I shall stay ashore after tomorrow morning. Whatever else I can do, pray consider me at your service."

He was aware that he was talking in conventional, almost stilted fashion but these two English ladies seemed veneered in some way with a crust, of prejudice on the aunt's part, of propriety, perhaps, on the niece's. A formal call could hardly have been less familiar. He had done his duty but somehow they seemed to take it all as the proper thing for him to render as tribute to their king.

They are flesh and blood all right, he thought, and the girl is good looking but somehow they don't seem altogether human. Just plain British, I suppose.

"I've got to be getting back to the schooner," he said aloud. "Good night."

"Good night," said the girl, "and thank you so much."

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LOUDON laughed to himself as he went back to the road. A glass of sherry and a "Thank you so much," with a grip of the hand that was impersonal, almost masculine. And the natives called her *Ta-rau-rani*, the Leaf of Heaven. Some imagination among these islanders.

He saw no more of the sergeant and regained the pandanus brush. The sliver of a moon had arisen seaward and the place was full of spidery shadows. Between the clumps, the beach sloped up once more sharply from the terrace on which he stood, showing in patches of silver gray. One of these was momentarily blocked by a moving figure.

Loudon's memory flashed back to the man swimming in the lagoon. Some one was spying on him, had seen him land. Perhaps they had been sent ashore for that purpose or, more likely, had made the trip on a private jaunt arrested by the sight of Loudon swimming to the beach.

As the thoughts registered, he leaped ahead and turned sharply to the right. The man, unearthed, ran swiftly ahead of him, a native clad in a loin-cloth. Loudon sprinted after him, determined to settle the matter out of hand. He ran fast, in long strides, and was close upon his man when the latter wheeled and squatted suddenly in the sand.

Loudon checked himself with a straining effort, sliding ankle deep, feeling for his holster as he glimpsed a knife-blade in the native's hand. The man flung himself forward, grasping at Loudon's knees with one arm just as Loudon kicked the wrist below which curved the knife.

The weapon shot off at a tangent and Loudon, overbalanced as his other leg was swept from under him, fell a-sprawl, getting a hold on his opponent as the latter whirled uppermost. Scrambling and struggling, they clawed their way to the brink of the terrace and rolled over and over, close-gripped, to the lower beach.

Loudon's mouth was gritty with sand, his ribs cracking beneath the bear-hug of the native, when the latter struck the junction of his arm bones on a clump of coral and, in the exquisite agony of the moment, relaxed.

Loudon's pistol was still in his hand, choked and useless for firing, even if he cared to risk the sound of a shot. He brought it down on the base of the man's skull and rose as the other's uncoordinated limbs refused office. The man seemed to spin on the top of his head like a decapitated chicken, then dropped limp on the sand. Breathing heavily, Loudon made a closer examination. It was Tomi, boatswain of the *Manawa!*

He remembered the sour look on the kanaka's face when the skipper ordered him to remain aboard. He must have slipped off to join the revel on the beach, seen Loudon in the lagoon and determined to watch him as an excuse for his own absence should it be discovered.

Loudon looked off to the schooner. There was a lantern moving about her deck. It might be incidental but, on the other hand, they may have knocked at his cabin and perhaps found the trailing rope of straps that he had left dangling for his return.

There was no time to lose but Tomi must be effectually muzzled. He doubted the efficacy of a bribe. A sound came across the water. He caught the creak of blocks. A boat was being lowered.

Loudon took off his belt and bound the still senseless Tomi. Thankful for his vanity, he used his necktie to secure the man's wrists. It was of knitted silk and long enough to make a good job of it. Next he stripped the native of his loin-cloth and, with a wad of crumpled weed, improvised a gag.

With an effort he lifted the bulk and slung the limp form across his shoulder, plugging up the slope and into the edge of the thick bush of guava scrub that furred the foot-hills. Hastily he deposited his burden in a gap between the shrubs, confident that he would remain there until the morning when he would have to find other means to handle him.

The main thing, he felt, was to get back to his cabin if he could, undiscovered, and go ashore in the morning fully equipped for a stay and possible complications. He had committed himself to the adventure and he would see it through despite the stand-offishness of the women he sought to serve, with their subtle barrier of caste.

The boat was nearing the shore with a regular click of oars. He dared not cross the beach to the water and he returned to the pandanus. The boat beached and two figures landed. The crew pulled the boat out on the sand and sat on the thwarts.

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The two figures came toward him. He recognized the skipper and Brewster as he crouched. Soon he could hear their conversation.

"It's not nine o'clock yet," said Brewster.

Loudon had thought it nearer eleven in the pressure of events.

"They'll be up and we can excuse ourselves by saying that we want to get away on account of lack of cargo and wanted the matter settled," continued Brewster. "That feast tomorrow will get the natives acting like a lot of cannibals and drive home the point. We'll get them to keep the matter quiet, boost our dude friend off on a hunting trip and haul out."

"Ye've a guid heid on ye for details," replied the skipper. "But we must go canny, man. I misdoubt yon Loudon. If the girl's as pretty as they claim, he'll be mooning around."

"We'll handle him——"

Brewster's voice died away. Loudon breathed more easily. Tomi's absence had not been noticed, or counted, and he was still thought to be in his cabin. He had been just in time to warn them. Now he had to get past the native crew of the boat before the skipper and Brewster came back from their disappointment.

Luck was with him. The enticement of the fires, the songs and the liquor had proved too much for the boatmen. They had stolen off, leaving one man in charge and he was looking longingly toward the palace. Loudon snaked his way down the beach, taking advantage of a little gully in the sand, and slipped into the water, making a detour to avoid possible observation.

The tide was slack and he made quick progress, finding his rope where he had left it. It was not easy to get back but he managed it and swiftly changed, rolling his wet clothes into a bundle that he hid beneath his bunk, wiping up the floor and getting into his pajamas.

The steady murmur of voices came from Edler and Griffin in the cabin. An hour passed as he lay wide-eyed before he heard the sound of returning rowlocks. There was an excited babble in the cabin with the entry of Henderson and the gambler, a slight scrape at his door and then a knock.

"Who's that?" he called sleepily.

"Are you awake?" It was Brewster's voice.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Want to get into a little game to get your hand in for tomorrow?"

"No, thanks," he sang out.

There was a low laugh. They had found out that he was in the cabin. Whatever faint suspicions they may have had were lulled. So far, he had played his cards successfully.

He fell asleep wondering how Tomi was faring in the guavas.

LOUDON was up at dawn, but so was Henderson and he could not shake off the skipper until first Brewster and then Edler and Griffin came on deck. Loudon could read no sign on their faces as to their failure or chagrin. No mention was made of Tomi. Breakfast was early and the shore boat ordered for eight o'clock. Tomi always handled the steering sweep and Loudon looked inquiringly at the native who took the place of the boatswain.

"What's wrong with Tomi?" he asked casually.

"Went ashore last night, I suppose," answered the skipper. "They're a' alike when they get a sniff o' free liquor in their snoots. He'll be showin' up wi' a sore heid and I'll gi' him a sore back to keep it company."

It was said smoothly enough but to Loudon it lacked conviction somehow. But there was no sign of their thinking that he had visited the bungalow and he had his weapons and a kitbag full of necessaries with him. He began to talk of the shooting.

"I'll make a start early tomorrow morning, I think," he said. "How long do you expect to be here, Mr. Henderson?"

"We'll be lying here for a week or more. If ye need an extra day or so to mak' the island trip wi' the king, I can arrange that weel enough."

Loudon caught the transient gleam that signaled from eyes to eyes among the quartet. Once he was ashore he did not care so much what or when Tomi told them save that, realizing the English women knew of their treachery, the Hawks would the sooner throw away the mask. He did not think that the idea of giving up the money would be lightly entertained. Edler and Griffin might be content with a liberal sandalwood concession but the right to

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grant that would lie with the commissioner's representative.

It would be better to muzzle Tomi for a while longer until the general situation was more plainly revealed. A bribe would be the best, perhaps. Five dollars for every day the kanaka kept silence would be a powerful bid with Tomi, if he could be trusted not to double-cross his paymaster.

Try as he would, Loudon could not rid himself of one or other of the plotters. If he was not under active suspicion he was under surveillance. A great crowd had gathered for the *souruka*, the beach was packed with canoes. The friendly sergeant informed him that a trim boathouse held the commissioner's launch.

"But hit hain't workin', sir," he volun-, teered. "I think the batteries his weak. The kanaka w'ot 'ad charge hof hit was a blighter hand, a slacker."

Loudon had no time to comment before Edler strolled up. If the launch was out of commission, a plan he had held of persuading the ladies to ship the gold and run over to New Mecklenburg, seventy miles away, after nightfall, was rendered idle.

He stowed his kitbag temporarily in a room at the palace on the suggestion of the king. It was locked against native curiosity. A subtle sense of preparedness caused him to hang on to his rifle and shotgun. His automatic with its clip-case and his sheathed knife were on his belt under his linen tunic.

There was a general confusion as the dancers made their appearance and he managed temporarily to lose his trailers in the crowd, while he hurried off to the guava scrub to find Tomi. Loudon found the hollow among the shrubs where he had deposited him, his knitted tie was caught among the branches of one of them—but the boatswain had gone.

Loudon frowned; his knots had been square and tightly pulled. Some one had unbound the prisoner. He had not been carried off, the tie disproved that.

He turned back, barely free of the scrub before he met Edler.

"Coming to get you," said the gambler. "The show's starting."

Loudon tried in vain to read Edler's inscrutable eyes. The action was friendly enough and, if they knew, why did they keep up the show of friendship?

CHAPTER VI

THE SOURUKA DANCE

NUTSHELL anklets rattled, panpipes shrilled and bamboo trumpets squawked in barbaric rhythm as the thirty-six picked dancers of the *souruka* stamped across the turf in a wedge-like phalanx, their brown bodies bent double, arms swinging and heads jerking in time to the crude melody.

The front rank was composed of four sets of fours, giants all of them, white cockatoo feathers in their hair, bedecked in gaudy loin-cloths, necklaces of shell, armlets and anklets of brass and copper twinkling and jangling in the vivid sunshine.

Then came four sets of threes, backed up by four sets of twos, the dancers furnishing their own music and working themselves and the crowd into a frenzy. The whites of their eyes showed bloodshot. Little flecks of foam flew from their open, white-fanged mouths as they leaped and darted from side to side in well-trained precision.

Ahead of them all sprang Toruki, no longer Chancellor of the Exchequer but reverted to a *tindalo*, the Melanesian prototype of *kahuna*, *ju-ju* man, medicine-man or *shaman*, admixture of savage cunning and ferocity. It was his hour and he made the most of it.

A bar of shell was thrust through the septum of his nose; his ear-lobes were distorted into circles kept open by rings of turtle-shell; long strings of shark and human teeth swung from his neck; he wore an apron of human thigh-bones, and paradise plumes topped his mop of hair. With every stamp his body shot out to right and left from the hips or he tossed his head aloft at the shriek of the pipes with every primal instinct of lust and cruelty being lashed to its top pitch, deliberately invoked.

The white men looked on with the characteristic lack of emotion that the dominant race uses as its most effective weapon. But, as Loudon glanced at the crowd, almost a thousand strong, marked with the night's debauch, and saw the reflection of the elementary passions that clashed on Toruki's brutal features, he felt how slight was the barrier that restrained the islanders from running *amok*. This was the South Sea islander with the thin veneer of civilization stripped off, the savage in the raw, ready

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for riot and rapine. He thought of the two white women with only the sergeant and the shadowy protection of a promised gunboat five months hence as protection and mentally shuddered.

Rotorua sat stolid with his chin in his hand, only his eyes betraying his sympathy with the common excitement. There were no weapons visible. Loudon's guns were in their cases behind where he sat.

The high-pitched notes grew piercingly shrill, the leaps of the dancers higher and, as Toruki swept by, his eyes flamed at the *papalangi*—the white foreigners—with insolence, greed and a bestial something that reminded Loudon of tales of smoking ovens in the sand where the "long pig" was cooked. The natives of Hapai were not a generation removed from cannibalism if those tales were true.

The phalanx swept off in a long curve, splashing and stamping through the lacy surf line and came charging up to where Rotorua sat, bediamonded and badged, his tunic unbuttoned, his gold-striped trousers discarded for the easy loin-cloth, gradually emerging from the chrysalis of civilization, surrounded by his chiefs and visitors.

With a last wild leap they stopped exhausted and changed in a twinkling from brutes to children, smilingly anxious for applause. All save Toruki, who stalked off glowering toward a little group that stood apart.

"What's wrong with our friend?" asked Brewster, whispering to Henderson.

"He's miffed at the leddies not being here," answered the skipper. "He's the big thing today, ye ken, and he wants to show himself off. They sent their excuses and he considers it an insult. He's half drunk wi' liquor and half wi' excitement, and he's naturally a bad one. If he'd the say of it, he'd ha' brought 'em here by force but he's not crossing the king. He'd be willing to do that from all I hear, if he had the backing but Rotorua's some fightin' man, for all his fat."

"Ah," commented Brewster, half closing his eyes.

Loudon looked at him sharply. The gambler was wearing his professional look. There was some scheme started in his crooked brain by Henderson's words.

Cases of gin were broached, green cocoanuts brought and the rickies mixed and freely passed. The king's heavy face lightened to a sense of jovial hospitality. An odor of fish and pig, savory and tempting, came from the ovens that were being opened, and the younger women began to pass around leaf platters and spread great mats upon the grass, setting them with calabashes of sauce, baskets containing boned pigeons, tiny live fish, sections of squid, steaming breadfruit and, finally, big wooden dishes heaped high with roasted pig and steamed mullet. Bowls of fruit supplemented the feast.

There was enough for thrice the number and the islanders gorged until their gullets refused to act from the sheer ache of overwork. *Kawa* flowed like water, replacing the gin as the bottles set aside for the occasion were exhausted.

The sun lowered and the smacking of lips ceased as the crowd began to nod and finally sprawl upon the sand. Loudon had eaten far more than his wont but the novelty of the occasion had offset his drowsiness while he marveled at the capacity of the king. Gargantua was an amateur compared to the monarch. He drained a bowl of *kawa*, sighed and called for a bowl of *poi*. This he cleaned with his greasy fingers, wiped them on leaves and shouted for the musicians and dancers, seemingly as sober as when he started.

"Some capacity, that," commented Edler enviously.

"The *poi* is to line his stomach and prevent fermentation," said the skipper. "Ye'll find his heid clear enough when ye start to play cards wi' him. It takes a week o' this sort o' thing to show on the likes of him. They judge a man by the way he eats as well as the way he fights in the Magdeburgs."

Loudon looked round for Toruki but the chief had departed. Through the feast he had eaten sullenly, washing down every mouthful with liquor. The natives who appeared to be his especial following had gone too. There was a little gap where they had sat.

The dancers came on, posturing and declaiming of fights and voyages, gradually changing to more sensuous movements as the drums throbbed and nose flutes squealed. The king's eyes glowed and from time to time he looked at his guests benignantly, playing the generous host who provides for the pleasure of his fellow revelers.

Henderson and Brewster were cold sober.

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Edler had his arm about a flower-trimmed maiden and Griffin snored with his head in the lap of a buxom dame who grinned victoriously at her sisters while she kept the flies from the sleeping man with a palm fan.

A SHOUT rang out, followed by the shriek of a woman and then a shot. They came from the direction of the commissioner's bungalow. Loudon jumped to his feet, grabbing for his rifle, uncasing and fitting it as he ran and slipping cartridges into the breech. He could hear the feet of others spattering the sand as they followed him and the cry of Henderson to "Tak it easy, man. Dinna interfere."

He hurdled the senseless sleepers, convinced that the shriek had come from a white woman's throat, that the two women were in danger and that Toruki was mixed up in it. Once, as he sped through the pandanus, he heard the stentorian bellow of the king and then he sighted the coral wall backed by the scarlet-spotted hibiscus hedge.

He did not wait to reach the gate but jumped the wall, crashing through the shrubs, caught his footing and raced on round to the back of the house.

Midway he met a native, gray with terror, gibbering as he ran.

"Toruki, he kill white Marys," gasped the man. "Plenty *pirikia* (trouble)."

Loudon left him spurting for a safer place. He rounded the house and saw the sergeant in the grip of two of Toruki's followers, his rifle in the hands of another. Against the back of the bungalow wall stood Mrs. Gower. Beside her was her niece with a shotgun in her hands, her determined profile clear on a background of breadfruit foliage.

Toruki, his arms akimbo on his naked hips, confronted her, his men grouped behind him brandishing spears while some held bows and arrows ready.

"One step," said the girl, "and I fire."

Toruki grunted. He could understand the meaning of her glance and the purport of her words. He was afire with brute passion and malignancy but he wavered, knowing the action of a "scatter-gun" at short range. Behind him he knew the warriors were awaiting his move. If he allowed a "white Mary" to make a mock of him his prestige would be gone, his potency as a wizard dissipated.

He wheeled, ordering his men with swift words as they scattered before him and spread to left and right.

The girl lowered the muzzle of her weapon, thinking she had won, and raised it smartly as the natives returned in sharp curves on either side of her. Even as one grasped her aunt, who struck smartly at the clutching arm and scored the apish face with her nails, she pulled the trigger and a man fell prone, the full charge in his shoulder. Another leaped and struck down the barrel of the gun and Toruki swept in toward her.

Loudon, shaken from his run, steadied his rifle muzzle against the corner of the house and aimed for Toruki. But the mob swirled in and he threw down the cumbersome weapon, pulling his automatic and driving for the mêlée. He fired one cartridge at close quarters, burning the flesh of the man, who dropped, leaving a gap through which Loudon sprang, smashing on toward Toruki who held the girl in his arms.

Some one caught him around the waist and he fired over his shoulder, sprinting on as the kanaka dropped groaning. Forms swerved in between him and the girl. His wrist was seized and a native sprang upon his back. Fighting desperately, wondering why he was not thrust through with a spear, Loudon found himself powerless.

Then came shouts and a deep guttural "*PAU*" that boomed above the rest. Dizzy from the manhandling he had suffered, Loudon saw the crowd melt away and darted forward to the side of the girl who was staggering backward. A mighty bulk had broken through the mob and sent Toruki spinning aside with the thrust of one great arm.

The girl tripped over her gun which lay on the ground and Loudon caught her. Rotorua stood like a lion amid a pack of jackals, bellowing gutturals that dissipated the would-be ravishers like chaff before the wind. His incongruous attire did not detract from the warrior-like pose as he stood unarmed but powerful, haranguing the crestfallen Toruki, who snarled back with his pointed teeth showing in a leer of rage and disappointment.

For a second the girl lay in Loudon's arms, feminine and fragrant, like a flower. Then she slid from his embrace and ran to her aunt. Mrs. Gower's faded eyes showed

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sparks, her angular figure was erect and her words flowed indignantly as she apostrophized the king who paid not the slightest attention to her.

Brewster and Henderson came up, presumably to offer congratulations, but the girl snubbed them while she tried to soothe her aunt. The sergeant came forward and the widow ordered him to "clear the grounds of this mob" with the gesture of an offended queen dowager.

Toruki retreated sulkily before the thunders of the king and soon only the trampled flower-beds and crushed shrubbery showed evidence of the assault. Loudon retrieved his rifle. The back of his neck was sore and stiff, one arm was wrenched and generally he felt chagrined.

These British women, he thought, appeared to imagine they lived and were served by divine appointment. But he had to laugh as he called up the vision of Mrs. Gower ordering off the rabble that a moment before had held her and her niece helpless. If there had been an executioner handy, he told himself, she would have ordered their heads lopped off and witnessed the sight with enjoyment and supreme satisfaction. As for me, he decided, I should have been committed to the Tower for laying profane hands upon her niece.

"I beg your pardon, sir." It was the sergeant. "Miss 'Argrave presents her compliments, sir, hand she 'opes to 'ave the 'onor of thanking you in person, sir. Hin the parlor, sir. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

The word "parlor" was the last straw. One moment a desperate strife with savages among the riot of a tropical garden, almost a jungle—the next, a request to come and be thanked in the "parlor." He laughed until the tears came and threatened hysteria in the reaction.

"Did Mrs. Gower present her compliments also?" he asked.

There was the hint of a twinkle in the sergeant's gray eyes.

"She didn't mention hit hat the moment, sir, but I think she will. She's a bit 'asty, sir, his Mrs. Gower—" he pronounced it Gore—" 'er 'usband was a Honorable. 'Im hand 'is brother was killed at Ypres the same day hand she might 'ave been 'my lady.' She's a bit 'uffy, sir, hat times, but she's a well-meaning lydy. That was nice work you did, sir. I wished I could 'ave 'elped you but they 'ad me 'eld tight. Winged one hof them, and hanother hin the 'ip, you did. 'E won't dance no *souruka* hin a 'urry. Hever hin the harmy, sir? No sir? You hought to be. This w'y."

"Just a minute, sergeant. I left a shotgun on the beach, in a case."

"I'll get hit, sir. Don't you worry habout that. You're a guest hof the king, hin a w'y, hand they won't touch your stuff. Hit's *tapu*. Hunless some hof your hown friends tyke a fancy to hit."

CHAPTER VII

TEA AND TREASURE

THERE was no one in the big living-room that Sergeant Bristol had dubbed the "parlor" and the soldier left Loudon to his own devices after intimating that the ladies were "hadjusting their hattire."

Loudon wandered round the room looking casually at the photographs on the walls. There was a big one of the King—George not Rotorua—one of a fierce-visaged apoplectic individual in the regalia of a British diplomat. This, he imagined, was the likeness of the late commissioner. There were two or three views of typically English subjects: a villa by a river, a lawn-party on the terraced turf of a quaint manor, a group of young men in flannels. The whole room seemed subtly different from anything that he had known in America.

"These people live on a little island of their own wherever they may happen to be," he soliloquized. "If many of them are like aunty, they are welcome to their privacy. Plucky, though, both of them," he mentally added as he remembered the swing of the girl's gun to her shoulder, as easily as if she had been shooting partridges, and the deliberate gouging of the kanaka's face by the militant widow.

The two women entered and he rose to receive them. They had changed their dress and showed no signs of having gone through a racking experience. Toruki might have been the curate paying a parochial visit, thought Loudon, for aught the girl or her aunt displayed.

It all gave Loudon a peculiar feeling of aloofness, as if he was playing a rôle and was not at all sure of his lines. He could see the color of the girl's eyes now, gray, flecked with brown, steady, impersonal. He tried

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to think of a word that exactly fitted their expression and failed. They were neither haughty nor condescending yet he felt himself regarded as a specimen in a way that was formal, yet friendly. The eyes matched the coolness and quality of her firm, slender fingers, the confident poise, the "divine right" air he had already attributed to them.

It was the girl who spoke first as she came toward him. Whether by right of her father's position and her own as his representative, by some obscure matter of precedence or by her own personality, she evidently controlled her elder relative who examined Loudon with the faraway air worn by visitors to a museum, looking much like a none-too-amiable macaw as to features. Loudon found himself waiting for her periodic sniffs.

"We have to thank you again, Mr. Loudon," said the girl in the manner of one pinning a medal on a ranker.

"I wasn't much good, I am afraid. There were too many of them."

"They took Bristol unawares as he was working in the garden. We have noticed symptoms of trouble since my father died but we did not dream that Toruki would dare——"

"My dear Serena. It was drink, not daring. What is to be expected? Authority has been removed and they have naturally slumped into savagery. Toruki was always a trouble-maker. As for Rotorua, he is a fool."

"Serena," thought Loudon. How the name fitted her! That was the word to express her eyes. "Serene."

"Rotorua is perfectly loyal, aunt. He has amply proven it. And Toruki will be punished."

Mrs. Gower subsided under the incisive authority of the girl's speech.

"I am my father's representative, Mr. Loudon," went on the latter. "I have heard that these men on the schooner—you perhaps know that they visited us last night and we refused their offer—have a wish to secure a sandalwood concession from Rotorua. It is not in the king's power to grant such a valuable right, or any right. They are vested in the government which in turn supports Rotorua, assigns to him a certain proportion of the revenue and protects him in his kingship. He has complete control over certain crown properties but he may not give out concessions. He will not. I informed him of his position in the matter this morning."

"Are you not afraid that the natives, in the absence of actual authority, will overstep the bounds of license? I understand that the men have deserted from the sergeant."

The girl looked at Loudon with a smile that betokened amusement.

"I am the authority," she said. "Mr. Loudon, in the Canadian Northwest a single mounted redcoat can go unarmed into a rebellious tribe and quell the insurrection and arrest the leaders, not by his own force but because the British Government is back of him. Rotorua knows, Toruki knows, that whatever they may do that is wrong they will ultimately have to pay for. And Rotorua has already shown his loyalty and good sense. We British, when we colonize, do not enslave, we govern."

Loudon felt he should be rebuked and said so.

"I beg your pardon. But it seems to me that the situation is out of the ordinary. Do I understand that you intend remaining here until the gunboat arrives, without any attempt at communication?"

"Not without attempt at communication. We have no wireless, the launch is out of commission. But Rotorua will intimate to the men on the schooner that a stay is not desirable. I do not think it wisest to show any knowledge of the plot at the present time. Rotorua and his natives are like children. They have been under austere authority and now they want to play. It would not do to test the situation too harshly. We have no force and we must employ other methods. Neither do we wish to make your own position uncomfortable by revealing that you caused us to refuse the trip.

"There is more money on hand than has been mentioned. There was a considerable sum found when the island was taken from the Germans. There are several outlying atolls that have given up a quantity of good pearls. All this is in my possession. Toruki is nominally Chancellor of the Exchequer but all warrants must be viséed by the commissioner or his representative. Other ships may follow yours now that commerce is commencing again. They may bring men wanting other concessions. Sergeant

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Bristol could not cope with the occasion. It is necessary that I remain, and I shall do so."

It was all said so clearly and with such quiet force that Loudon lost sight of the fact that he was talking to a girl.

"We feel that you have done so much for us," she went on, "that you are entitled to frankness on our part. And we want you to do more. We want you to communicate our situation to our Government as soon as you make a landing where you can get in touch with New Mecklenburg or with any vessel carrying wireless. The schooner will leave tomorrow."

LOUDON bowed his willingness. He was dismissed. He had done a few little things—some folks would have been more grateful—but he had been thanked for them, given his instructions and now he was to leave with the *Manawa*. The British Government, in the person of this serene-eyed girl, did not want him shooting or making trips with the king. The signs were up. The place was posted. He was apparently as much a trespasser as his rascally fellow-passengers.

It was really funny, particularly if Tomi came through with information that would make his presence on the schooner disagreeable—to say the least of it—to the skipper and the rest. But he had not yet come to that bridge. He was mildly satirical in his answer, mainly for his own satisfaction, being perfectly sure that sarcasm applied to these estimable ladies would be as water to a duck's back.

"The clearance of the *Manawa* will relieve you a little of responsibilities which you seem perfectly capable of handling, Miss Hargrave, and it seems presumption on my part to advise you."

"She is the daughter of a diplomat," put in Mrs. Gower. "You can have no idea, Mr. Loudon, of the intricacies connected with representation."

"I suppose not. My own father was in the United States consular service for many years and I got some glimpses of the life."

"Indeed?" The widow unbent a little. "May I ask where?"

She unbent still more graciously as Loudon mentioned the districts and exchanged glances with her niece.

"You are traveling for pleasure?"

"Yes—and whatever excitement turns up. Might I ask you, Miss Hargrave, if this money and pearls is well secured? The *Manawa* sails tomorrow, you say, but there may be others. With no guard but the sergeant until I can inform your Government of your situation, which I shall be pleased to do, might I suggest that it offers considerable temptation and is a commodity that might easily be carried off and disposed of.

"All comers might not consider the fear of reprisal from your Government as a deterrent, providing they got a good start. I am not at all sure that these adventurers from the schooner may not make an attempt, and your natives, however loyal their intentions, are hardly in a condition or frame of mind to provide protection. I shall be in touch with the men this evening. We are to be at the palace. I should be glad to offer my services."

"Thank you. It will not be necessary. But we should be glad to have you stay for dinner. Serve tea, sergeant."

Sergeant Bristol, unconscious of the incongruity of his drill-stiffened movements and uniform, had appeared with bread and butter, cut wafer-thin, with tea and preserves, which he handed around. The whole situation was incongruous.

Loudon wondered whether the *Manawa* would haul out on the morrow. He doubted whether the Hawks would willingly give up the treasure once they had set their minds upon it. The bravery of the girl was unquestioned, her confidence sublime, but to him it seemed foolhardy. Yet it was not up to him to enforce his services. If the *Manawa* left, well and good. Until it did he would keep his eye upon their safety from the sheer standpoint of a man's duty.

And he accepted the invitation to dinner. The girl piqued him. She was an unfamiliar type. He knew plenty of American girls who were self-sufficient but this one outdid them. Loudon was not a philanderer but he was not hypocritically unconscious of the usual effect of his personality upon the other sex. But this Serena—so well named—seemed, not sexless, for the memory of her slimness lying fragrant in his arms was still poignant, but over-armored with maidenhood.

You couldn't imagine a man kissing her and getting fifty-fifty, he thought and then realized that he was imagining just such a situation. And they were kissable lips, once the curves could be softened a little.

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But he instinctively felt that one would have to secure a permit of some sort from some accredited authority before, even were the lady willing, such an attempt would be considered proper.

Presently he found himself talking with her about life in America and American customs. Mrs. Gower supplied a sniffing accompaniment that indicated her small opinion of the freedom enjoyed by American girls but she also had thawed until, when the lamps were lit at dusk, the atmosphere was quite pleasant and even homelike.

Serena Hargrave told him of her father and how he had caught the fatal fish and insisted upon eating them cooked by Sergeant Bristol upon the beach of a little atoll while they were fresh. He had died rather horribly, it seemed, inside of twelve hours and the nature of his death, plus the climate, had ordered an early interment.

"That is one reason," she told him, "why I do not want to leave. When we do go, father's body must be taken with us."

Loudon's own parents being both dead they found a common ground in their orphanage. The chat soon led to lighter things until the sergeant announced dinner, serving an appetizer of sherry and orange bitters. The meal was excellent, with much formality of crystal and silver.

Bristol, it appeared, was an invaluable factotum. Since the native help had drifted away under the lure of Rotorua's announcement, the sergeant had done everything, playing chef and guarding the flag after Mrs. Gower's championship of the ensign, with equal imperturbability and thoroughness.

After the meal the girl played. Loudon had heard little of the piano save through mechanical renditions and the girl's touch, the swift rhythm of her supple fingers up and down the keys, was a revelation. She did not play long, announcing that Loudon must wish to return to the palace for his engagement. He had little desire for it now but he could not well say so.

"You asked me where the money was," she said as he rose. "I will show you."

She led the way to a room that windowed to the back garden. It was fitted up as an office library. The dead man's guns and fishing-tackle hung on the walls above the book-shelves. In a corner near the window stood a ponderous safe.

Loudon surveyed it scornfully. It was of the vintage of thirty years ago. A good burglar could open it with a putty-knife, he thought. The girl spun the combination and opened the doors that looked so sufficient but were only as strong as their weakest part, the out-of-date lock and combination. She showed him one drawer filled with the parchmenty notes of Great Britain and a compartment that held many bags of chinking sovereigns. A separate box of steel was almost abrim with pearls, shimmering in the lamplight, faintly irridescent.

A yellow blind of oiled muslin masked the window. Beyond the panes were slatted blinds which were closed. As Loudon looked at the pearls he heard the click of one of the slats. The inside blind was not quite down to the bottom of the sill.

And, peering through a slat, were two eyes, glazed like those of a cat in the reflection of the lamp.

The next second they disappeared as Loudon pulled his automatic and laid it on the top of the safe while he threw up the blind, unfastened the catch of the sash and then those of the outer blinds, grabbing his gun and jumping from the sill to the lawn, some five feet.

A shadow streaked across the far end of the garden, too vague for a target. As Loudon started to run, the flash of a rifle blazed from some shrubbery and the sergeant stepped out.

"Got 'im that time, sir," he said with quiet exultation. "Thought there might be some of the blighters snoopin' habout. 'E's in the *crotons*."

The girl was up with them now, having followed Loudon through the window, bearing the same shotgun she had used that afternoon.

"Better stand back a bit, Miss," said Bristol. "'E's done for."

A dark figure lay sprawled out among the brittle harlequin leaves of the *crotons*. The foliage was grotesquely patterned in red and yellow but the red was not all of Nature's furnishing. The sergeant lit a match and Loudon caught sight of a gaily-colored loin kilt that he recognized. There was no need for the sergeant to turn over the dead man. It was Tomi.

He saw immediately what the man's mission had been. He had been sent ashore, not to spy on Loudon but to spy on the bungalow and find out where the treasury of Hapai was located so that the Hawks

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might be certain it was in the possession of the two Englishwomen. His encounter with Loudon had been accidental. Somehow he had been found in the bush by a native and released, not to return to the schooner until his mission was accomplished. Now he could never inform of Loudon's having been ashore.

The girl seemed unconcerned at the killing. To her it was a military execution. A native had trespassed on Government property and the sentry had shot him. Loudon did not feel called upon to reveal the man's identity.

"What are you going to do with him?" he asked.

"Bury 'im," said Bristol laconically. "Right hoff the reel. I never saw 'im before. Must 'ave come hover from one hof the hother hislands for the dance."

Loudon turned away with the girl.

"You see," he said, "the necessity of caution. If I were you I should bury that gold and those pearls and money. Any one could get into that safe of yours with a can-opener."

"That may be good advice," said the girl. "I shall ask Rotorua for a guard tomorrow. Most of the excitement will be over by then. And you should be able to get in touch with the commissioner at New Mecklenburg within a few days."

It seemed like an act of cowardice to leave two women in such a situation. After Toruki's display of savagery, Loudon had his doubts as to Rotorua's loyalty if sufficiently diluted with liquor. He remembered the incident of the flag. Retribution was poor solace for those who suffered. But one man could not do much and, after all, the schooner might not sail. That would give him a legitimate excuse to keep in touch with Bristol who, he fancied, would not be so averse to his services as the girl and her aunt. But he offered to stay.

"Thank you so much," said the girl. "But we shall get along quite nicely."

There was nothing to do but take his leave. The sergeant had shown his merit as a watch-dog. Loudon did not re-enter the bungalow. Somewhat disgruntled, he made for the palace. Half-way there he remembered his rifle. The sergeant had promised to get his shotgun. Doubtless they were together in the soldier's care.

I can get them early tomorrow, he thought and proceeded to the poker party.

CHAPTER VIII

A SHOW-DOWN

THE others were there ahead of Loudon, gathered in a room furnished with gilded settees and chairs upholstered in crimson plush, the double "R" emblazoned on their backs. On a table of polished hardwood stood a heterogeneous collection of bottles with glasses and fresh coconuts. The walls were hung with the kind of pictures that decorate water-front saloons, daubs of unclad females in languishing postures. A phonograph stood in one corner with the skipper tending it.

Edler and Griffin appeared somewhat the worse for wear but the gambler seemed fresh enough and Rotorua jovial but fairly sober. Loudon had not expected to see the skipper.

"I dinna mind lookin' on at the recklessness of others," said Henderson. "I've ill news for ye, Mr. Loudon. We're leavin' the morn. Ye'll ha' to forego that shootin'."

Vance looked appropriate surprise.

"I thought you were going to stay for several days. I don't mind the shooting so much as I do losing that trip with the king."

"I give up along that trip," said Rotorua. "That fellow Toruki he one—trouble fellow. He go along the mountain with one—two—plenty his people. Bimeby when you go, I go along mountain and bring back plenty head. My word, plenty shooting I think."

"That ought to be pretty good sport," said Edler. "Where did Toruki make for, king?"

"He go along Rapanui, windside of island. Tomorrow maybe I send for him. Suppose he no come I go fetch him along."

The king laughed, showing his firm white teeth. The bringing in of Toruki's head for insubordination might have been a fishing trip.

"How are you fixed for guns, king?" asked Brewster.

"Plenty gun. Maybe twenty rifle in next room."

"Lee-Enfields? If you are shy of cartridges we might be able to help you out."

"*Maholo.* Plenty cartridge along *lele* house outside. Gun no good without cartridge."

"That's right, king. Well, I hope you get him."

Loudon listened attentively. It looked

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as if Rotorua was loyal with the planning of this punitive expedition after Toruki. And he was obeying orders. The girl must have been right in her assumption of authority.

"How about your concession?" Loudon asked Edler as two natives brought in a green card-table and several decks of cards.

"That's all off," he said gruffly. "There's no trade on the island for Henderson and there's no use stopping here. We're going over to Saint Matthias and then to New Hanover if that freighter hasn't been ahead of us."

He seemed surly at the way things had turned out, but Brewster laughed.

"I'm the only one who's going to get a real chance," he said. "Come on, king, let's christen the new poker chips. We sail early and the night's getting old."

He opened the box he had given Rotorua and began to distribute the colored discs. But when he started to open one of the packs, Rotorua stretched out a heavy paw.

"We play along my cards," he said.

There was a twinkle in his eyes that met the gambler's. Brewster shrugged his shoulders.

"You're the boss, king," he said. "Whites a dollar, reds two, blues five, yellows ten and brown twenty. A hundred dollars a stack. Cash to the skipper."

It was going to be a lively game, Loudon concluded, but he paid his share without comment. Everything had turned out as the girl said it would. The king had evidently refused the concession and suggested a prompt departure which had been accepted by the Hawks and Henderson. Saint Matthias and New Hanover, he knew, lay directly northwest of New Mecklenburg and he would have an opportunity of carrying out his mission. The adventure was going to end tamely after all and in the best way for Serena Hargrave and her aunt.

Evidently Brewster intended to make the most of his opportunity. He would leave a plucked king behind him. But he did not underestimate a certain amount of shrewdness in the royal goose. Rotorua played his hands liberally but with good knowledge of their value. For a time he won.

Edler sat between the monarch and Brewster, with Loudon on the other side of the king. Henderson occasionally placed a fresh record on the phonograph and generally acted as dispenser of drinks. He made the king's longer and stronger than the rest but Rotorua tucked them away with seeming impunity from any effect.

Loudon drank as little as he could, following the example of Brewster. Edler and Griffin imbibed more freely and seemed to have acquired a certain high tide which did not reach their brains though their fingers occasionally toppled over their chips or had hard work handling the cards as the night passed.

Loudon, playing carefully, kept fairly even and watched instinctively for indications of the crooked work which he was sure the gambler was practising. He could see no signs of it until the king commenced to lose. Then he noticed that on these occasions Brewster was always dealer. It did not always happen when Brewster dealt. About once in three times. But Edler and Griffin invariably dropped out before or after the draw, as did Loudon, on the weakness of his hand. Rotorua generally raised before the draw and Brewster, drawing to two cards, sometimes four, would gather a hand that just won the pot.

Rotorua swore amiably and called for fresh decks but he was a good loser. There was a glittering pile of gold and notes in front of Brewster. The king's supply became exhausted and he called for a fresh stack of chips without paying for them.

"Are ye owin' for these?" asked Henderson.

"Make out an order on the treasury and I'll sign it," said Rotorua.

"Where do we cash it, if you lose?" asked Brewster, pleasantly enough.

For a moment the king blinked. Then he smiled.

"Toruki he not belong along treasury now," he said. "You get from Missy Hargrave. She got plenty money belong along me. My writing, *King* writing. Plenty good."

"Oh sure, king, sure," said the gambler. "But it's past two o'clock. If we sail with the ebb we'll be out before the ladies are up. Is the money at their house?"

Rotorua's face darkened.

"You not win yet," he said. "Suppose we wait along game is *pau* (ended). I put this along five hundred pounds."

He had gradually shed his clothing until he sat in his loin-cloth, fat but magnificent. His skin was smooth and glossy and, beneath all the excess tissue, there showed hints of massive bone and muscle. Henderson

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had said that Rotorua was "some fighter" and Loudon readily believed it. His gift-ax was slung across the king's shoulder.

He groped in the folds of his loin-cloth and brought up a pearl the size of a hazelnut. White would be a poor word to describe it. It was glossier than white satin, perfectly oval and slightly opalescent as it oscillated on the table. Brewster's lids opened slightly to let out a gleam of covetous satisfaction. Henderson picked up the pearl and appraised it in the palm of his hand.

"Five hundred it is, king. Do ye want it a' in chips?"

"*Ai.* And one new deck of cards."

Rotorua's supply was exhausted. Brewster reached back for one of the packs that had come with the chips and the king made no objection. The second round brought the deal to Brewster. Loudon fancied he could distinguish a slight tension in the way the swiftly placed cards were dealt.

Edler stayed. The king glanced at his cards and raised the ten-dollar ante to fifty. Loudon tossed in his little pair and Griffin, with a look at Brewster, saw the raise which was in turn covered by the gambler and Edler. Edler drew one card, Rotorua two, Griffin three and Brewster another three.

Edler had the edge and it was the king's bet. He slid in five brown checks.

"That's too rich for my blood," grumbled Griffin. "I'm in too deep already."

Brewster raised another hundred and Edler ran carefully over his cards before he laid them down with a sigh.

"I didn't catch it," he said. "It's up to you, king. Go after him."

Rotorua shoved in the hundred and raised it the same amount. Brewster repeated until Rotorua's last chip was up.

"Table stakes," said the gambler. "Want a show-down, king, or have you got any more pearls?"

The king's hand lay in front of him, face down. He had not looked at it since his first glimpse after the draw. He sat back in the plush until the springs creaked and asked the skipper for a drink. He drained it and his right hand dropped to his side while the great digits of his left tapped his cards.

"I've got one more pearl along of me," he said. "Veribig pearl. He worth maybe, oh one—two—three thousand pound. I call him one thousand. I bet."

HE FISHED away once more beneath his capacious paunch and produced a gem that made them gasp. Beside it the first was as a pea to a marble. It was pink, if such an irridescent thing could be classed by general tint. It held all the hues of a tender sunrise, rose and faint emerald with touches of azure and hyacinth. Loudon had never seen such a jewel. Warm from contact with the king's body, it seemed alive with borrowed vitality. At a thousand pounds it was more than cheap.

Across Brewster's immobile face ran the flicker of his sneering smile.

"I've got you beaten, king. Better make it a show-down."

He knew his man. Rotorua's eyes snapped.

"You call?" he asked. "Maybe you like bet some more."

But Brewster's chips were all up to meet the raise and his pocketbook was empty. He had no desire to borrow from Edler and Griffin and share a percentage of the win.

"I guess we'll have to make it a show-down, after all, king," he said easily. "Can you beat those?"

He spread his cards on the table, laughed and started to take in the chips and the two pearls.

The king's enormous paw shot out and covered the stakes.

"No good," he said. "I win."

Brewster shifted in his seat a trifle.

"What's the matter with you, king? Four kings don't beat four aces."

"*Five* kings win," said Rotorua. "You beat four king on table. By ——! You forget one king in chair."

The remainder of the pack lay close to the little pile of discards. Too quickly for the eye to follow, the king flashed out the little ax and drove the keen blade down into the cards, fastening them to the table.

Brewster's face went livid and his hand slid to his belt. Rotorua swept Edler, chair and all, crashing to the wall with the same motion that grasped Brewster and plucked him from his seat, shaken like a rat in the mighty grip, his automatic clattering to the floor.

Rotorua held him by one hand while with the other he tore loose the ax and spread out the cards. There was another ace among them.

"Ho," cried the king. "Now, by ——,

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you go along your ship——quick. Suppose you stay, you *mate* (dead)."

He tossed the gambler from him, hurling him against the slowly rising Edler and clapped his hands. He gave swift orders to the natives that entered and they ran out.

"Going for the guns," said Henderson. "Let's get out o' this."

The skipper's face showed alarm. Edler and Griffin were weaving on uncertain legs, fuddled by the sudden action. Brewster nursed his arm where the king had clutched it. Rotorua towered above them, his face indignantly wrathful, one arm flung out in stern dismissal.

"Sun come up bimeby, prettisoon," he said. "Tide all right. Suppose your ship inside *rau* (reef) plenty *pirikia* I make."

He turned to Loudon who stood behind his chair.

"You all right," said Rotorua. "You white man. Not *papalagi puaka* (foreign pigs). Not cheat. Not think Rotorua——fool. You make me present."

He tapped the ax.

"All a right. I make you present."

The king had gathered in the stakes and the banking money from in front of Henderson's swiftly vacated seat. He took the smaller of the two pearls and pressed it into the palm of Loudon's hand.

"I didn't lose anything like the value of this, king," Loudon protested.

"That all right. Plenty more pearl I can get. Plenty lagoon belong along crown, belong along me. Me, I like you. Today you fight. These *puaka* they cheat and coward. You take. Bimeby someday you come along Hapai other time, we go on long *motu* (canoe) trip.

The room was filled with loin-clad natives armed with rifles. The Hawks and Henderson left sullenly with the escort, Rotorua following with his hand on Loudon's shoulder. The kanakas enclosed the group and marshaled them down to the *Manawa's* whaleboat. The schooner's boys were already there.

"Where is Tomi?" asked Henderson suddenly. "By——I won't go wi'out Tomi."

The Hapai men laughed as he voiced his query in their tongue.

"Much better you go," said one of them. "King he plenty angry."

From up-beach came the roar of Rotorua. Reluctantly the skipper got into the boat.

Half-way to the schooner Edler laughed in maudlin fashion.

"Thought you said it was going to be easy money, Brewster," he jeered. "Your work was too coarse."

The gambler snarled fiercely.

"I'm not through with that fat fool yet," he said. "Wait till——"

Henderson touched him on the arm.

"Tak' your medicine like a mon till the time comes for ye to play doctor," he said and Brewster subsided.

Loudon kept his peace. He had expected some demand, from Edler and Griffin at least, for a share of the pearl to recoup their individual losses but they seemed to have forgotten the incident. He was out his kit-bag, his shotgun and rifle. Under the king's threat they would be leaving in two hours and any attempt at shore communication would be impossible.

The sergeant would probably look after them and he could ultimately retrieve them. Meantime he had the pearl. Once in some port, he would leave the blackguards with whom he had been perforce associating and deliver the girl's message to the Government. He might arrange to go back he thought. He liked Rotorua and, after Toruki had been captured and the island settled down, they might yet take the big canoe trip.

"We'll ha' to mak' the best o' a bad bargain," said Henderson philosophically. "Tide'll serve in an hour. No use for us to go to bed. I'll get Mac' to serve us some hot coffee. Is that agreeable? Ye'll join us, Mr. Loudon? I'm sorry things ha' turned out this way. There's tricks in a' trades, ye ken. Rotorua waters his *copra*."

It seemed a lame attempt to excuse Brewster who had left the cabin. Loudon remembered the fifth ace. But it was no good to deliberately start a quarrel by telling the others what he thought of them. They knew that. The least said the sooner mended until he could get clear of them.

"I'll be glad of a cup of coffee," he said.

The supercargo returned with Brewster. The latter added a tot of rum to the steaming cups. Loudon made no objection. The liquor gave the coffee a queer taste but he swallowed his down.

As Loudon lowered his cup he saw the rest with their cups arrested half-way to their mouths. Brewster's face wore its sneering

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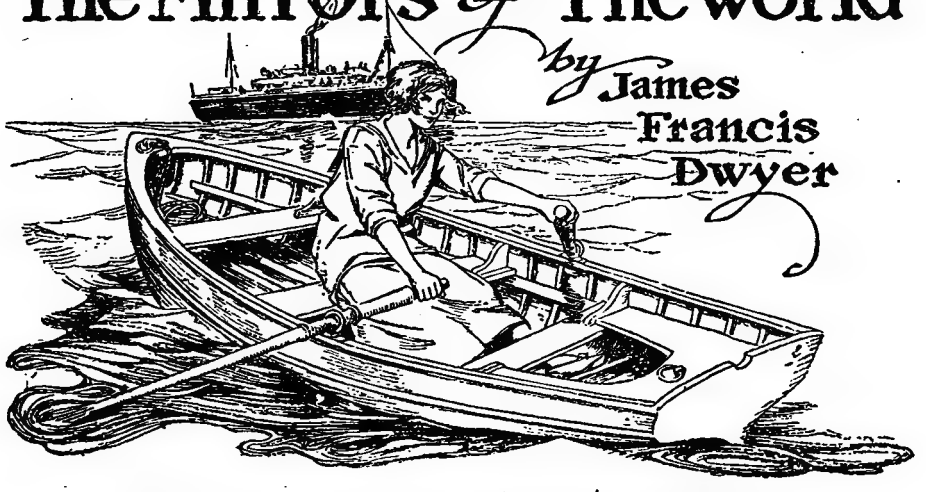
grin that suddenly spread while the gambler's face seemed to swell enormously then grow misty as the cabin swam and Loudon fought against the oblivion that swiftly rushed over him. He tried to rise but his legs were heavy as lead. His head dropped on his chest and he slumped down on the cabin table.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Mirrors of The World



by James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Soul of King Throsh," "Cha-Cha and Her Kitten," etc.

THE *Queen of the Rovers* rubbed a paint-blistered side against her pier in South Brooklyn and groaned dismally. The *Queen* had just waddled in from far-off Padang in Dutch Sumatra, and she had brought to New York a cargo of select serpents and untraveled primates.

The snake section of eighty-six varieties extended from the flatheaded spectacled viper to the big tree python, while the monkeys formed a chattering chain of aristocratic primates ranging from the wailing gibbon to the hairy-chested *simia wurmbili* or big orang-outang of Borneo. Waterfront reporters had constructed eleven stories out of the *Queen's* cargo and they still looked upon the animal ship as a potential copy producer.

The mate of the *Queen*, a tall, well-built and handsome young man, stood near the rail, his eyes fixed upon a heavy broad-shouldered man who was hurrying toward the gangway of the traveling zoo. The mate saw the stranger halt the cook of the *Queen* and put a question, and when the cook turned and pointed to the deck the mate muttered softly to himself.

"I'll bet this is the fellow that Mullins is sending to buy my baby baboon," he said. "Mullins said he was a saloon-keeper and this guy looks like one."

The big man came cautiously up the gangplank, stopped, looked sharply at the handsome mate, took off his tight-fitting derby, mopped the red welt made by the hat-band and gave a sigh of satisfaction.

The mate, confident that the big man was the prospective purchaser of the baboon, made a friendly remark.

"It's blazing hot," he said, "and you look as if you've been running."

"I have been running," said the big man, looking hard at the mate. "I've been running all round the world."

The mate looked surprised. His hopes of selling the baby baboon slumped.

"Yep," continued the big man, lowering himself cautiously onto a crate, "I've been gallopin' up and down the universe till I'm dog-tired. Fourteen months ago I sailed from the foot of Thirty-first Street,

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Brooklyn, for Marseilles. I got a bit of information there an' started on a hunt. Went to Port Said and from Port Said to a stinkin' place called Berbera. Ugh! Turns me sick to think of it. Trotted down the east coast of Africa to Mombasa and Mozambique an'—an' then across to Madagascar and Tomato."

"You mean Tamatave," said the mate quickly, his brown eyes fixed upon the traveler.

"Yep, Tamatave. That's it. Queer spot that. Got a boat out of there up to Bombay, boat that buckpumped like a bronco. Then I slithered across to Rangoon, waltzed across the China Sea to Banjermassin an' from there to Padang, the port you sailed from."

The mate of the *Queen* took three catlike steps in the direction of the big man.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Me?" said the stranger, still mopping his forehead. "Why, I'm Bob Kennedy of the Kennedy Detective Agency."

"And what the blazes do you want me for?" cried the mate.

"You're John Allington Seward, aren't you?" said the big man, rising.

"Sure! It looks as if you've been trailing me since I left Port Said!"

"Trailed you well, didn't I?" said Mr. Kennedy. "I'm the little rubber-heeled ferret when——"

"But what do you want me for?" interrupted the mate angrily.

"Come to the end of the pier an' see," said the big man cheerily. "Some one in that taxicab wants to talk to you."

"Who is it?"

"Old Martin Treves of Treves, Ballyman & Hobley of Nassau Street. Young man, your uncle, Dan Seward, died fourteen months ago an' I was sent to find you. You're the greatest wanderer I've heard of. I reached Padang two days after you sailed an' I got to New York three hours ago. You're heir to Uncle Dan's half million. Come along down to old Treves an' he'll tell you what you've got to do to get it."

John Allington Seward, standing beside the taxicab in which was the venerable senior partner of Treves, Ballyman & Hobley, heard the conditions under which he was to receive the full income from five hundred and sixteen thousand dollars' worth of gilt-edge stock.

"In the first place," said Martin Treves, "you must always keep a fire burning in the big open fireplace of the old Seward house on Forty-sixth Street.

"Uh, huh," murmured the legatee. "Twenty ton of coal a year and a couple of stokers will fix that."

"And in the second place," said the old lawyer, "you must not leave New York for more than one calendar month a year. When I say 'New York' I mean that part of the city and suburbs that lies within a ten-mile radius of the Seward home."

"Great crocodiles!" cried the young man, while the listening Mr. Kennedy vainly endeavored to hide a smile.

"You see," continued Treves, "your uncle had been expecting you to visit him ever since you left Harvard eight years ago and he put——"

"This clause in for spite!" cried the mate.

"Not for spite, young man," said the lawyer testily. "He wanted you to settle down, to be a decent American, a man with home ties, and a stake in the— Here! Where are you going?"

"Going back," said the mate, moving up the pier, and misquoting Mr. Kipling, "Going back to 'my little wailing lemurs, to my snakes and flying foxes.' "

"Wait!" cried Treves. "Wait and think it over, my boy. It's a lot of money."

"And little leg room," retorted the mate. "Who gets the coin if I refuse to accept the terms?"

"Cats," snapped Treves. "It will go to build homes for cats in all parts of the United States."

"Cats!" cried Seward.

"Yes, sir! Cats!"

John Allington Seward remained silent for a few moments, then he spoke.

"I hate cats," he said. "Wait a few minutes and I'll go with you. I'm going back for Potiphar and Cleopatra."

In ten minutes he returned, carrying a young female baboon and a squirming sack that the aged Treves viewed with suspicion.

"It's only Potiphar," explained the heir. "He's a big python but he's as harmless as a caterpillar. You're not frightened of poor old Pot, are you? Well, I'll ride with the chauffeur. Let her go, engineer, I'm aboard."

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NEW YORK with an income of twenty-five thousand may seem the Pike's Peak of earthly bliss to many people, but John Allington Seward had the soul of a hobo. On the invisible wall that held him prisoner the gods of the Long Trails, whose feet are never still, sat and grinned at him. Upon his ankles were golden shackles forged by the dead.

The hoot of a steamer in the North River made him writhe in agony, while the trains that sang the Song of The Road as they rocked and rolled, prompted him to heave ill-natured remarks at the memory of Uncle Dan. During those first months a Fifth Avenue touring agency, at the suggestion of a humorous friend of the ex-mate of the *Queen of the Rovers*, started to bombard John Allington with folders telling of the delights of round-the-world trips. The ex-mate went down to the agency, assaulted the clerk in charge of the publicity department and was fined twenty dollars in the Jefferson Market Court.

It was on a hot night in the last week of August, five months after John Allington Seward had come into his inheritance, that the trail fever which had been upon him for weeks reached a climax.

That evening he dined at Sherry's with Dicky Gorringe, Fred Kempton, Roland Merrill and three ladies, each of whom had fat and healthy but ill-founded dreams of days when she would help the ex-mate to spend his income.

John Allington Seward, much tired by the chatter, excused himself and wandered out of the dining-room. On that evening New York felt like a great clanging bowl of bronze under which he squirmed with millions of others while the demons of noise sat upon the bowl and banged it with hammers that were never still.

John Allington bought an evening paper, glanced at the baseball scores, then turned to the shipping page. His eye caught a heading, half way down the page. His cigar dropped from his mouth, and he gave a little cry of joy.

The party in the dining-room was forgotten. Jack Seward seized his hat, sprang down the steps and flung himself into a taxicab.

"South Brooklyn!" he shouted. "Ship *Queen of the Rovers!*"

"What line, sir?" asked the chauffeur.

"The line of the free!" cried Seward. "Give your old road tramp all the steam you can, son, and hoot for room!"

By the light from flying street-lamps John Allington Seward read again the news item which had made him forget his party. He lay back in his seat and laughed as he had laughed again and again over the almost identical story. There is only one breed of yarn for an animal ship and it seldom alters. The caption of the story ran:

ANIMAL SHIP ARRIVES FROM BORNEO *QUEEN OF THE ROVERS* DOCKS WITH BIG CARGO

COOK BATTLES WITH ANGRY PYTHON. BOATSWAIN KNOCKS DOWN GIANT ORANG-OUTANG WITH HIS FIST

Jack Seward sprang from the taxicab at the very spot where old Martin Treves had informed him of the conditions of his uncle's will. The wharf was dark. From the harbor came the groaning of wave-strained tramps that hated the Big Waters.

Seward sniffed the air and started at a run along the wharf, colliding almost immediately with a short, thickset man walking toward the street.

"Beg pardon," he said, then, as the other growled out an unintelligible remark, he stopped and put a question, "Is that you, Captain Hatterby?"

"Why, yes," said the short man. "Who is—Great snakes an' bullfrogs! It's Jack Seward!"

In the cabin of the *Queen of the Rovers* where the air had strange little scented strata that suggested curious nipa-palm villages, silence-ridden jungles and lonely spice islands in far-off seas the two men talked. In that cabin the gods of the Long Trails filed away at the golden shackles which Uncle Dan Seward had placed upon his nephew. The *Queen* was pulling out at midnight, bound for Pernambuco and Rio, and the longing for new places was greater than wealth to Captain Hatterby's ex-mate.

"It's hard to stay in one spot," said the captain. "You can do it if you love any one. I knew a sailorman who fell in love with a woman in Singapore, and he took a job at the Tanjong Docks an' never wants to go to sea. If there's a girl you could marry, Johnny, there might be——"

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"They're all after the coin," interrupted John Allington Seward. "Captain, the whole town makes me sick."

From above on the deck came the patter of bare feet, the shouts of Jack Seward's successor. A tug out in the river hooted violently and the *Queen of the Rovers* hooted in reply to inform the tug that it was with her he had the midnight appointment.

A little breeze came through the portholes, a curious little breeze that cooled Jack Seward's brow. A black monkey chattered softly to its offspring. The *Queen* started to cough softly. The gods of the Long Trails winked at each other.

Old Martin Treves of Treves, Ballyman, & Hobley, was surprised to receive in his mail on the morning following the dinner at Sherry's a note reading:

DEAR MR. TREVES:

I've pulled my anchor and am beating for the open sea. When the month is up give my coin to the tabbies. I'm through!

JOHN ALLINGTON SEWARD.

II

THE *Queen of the Rovers* bull-nosed, rusty and ungainly, rolled down the coast, butting her way through blue-white water. Captain Hatterby spent hours listening to Jack Seward's stories of New York life, the nephew of Uncle Dan, barefooted and bareheaded, reveling in his freedom.

"I know how you felt," said Captain Silas Hatterby one day when he grew emotional over the hard-hearted uncle who sought to confine his nephew within a ten-mile radius. "The blasted Japs caught me gettin' a few seals off Kereko once an' they kept me in a little cell for five months. The roof of that cell was so low I rubbed all the hair off my head tryin' to stand up straight."

The *Queen* rolled past Cape May, wallowed through a storm that struck her off Hatteras, and, with blunt nose set obstinately on her trail, pushed down past Charleston and St. Augustine, pitch bubbling from her deck seams, hot-lipped winds from the Equator kissing the cheeks of her crew.

South of Cape Canaveral the *Queen* swung toward the shore, and Captain Hatterby explained the reason to his ex-mate.

"Old Harry Derron is running Cardui Light," he said, "an' I've got some cigars an' a drop of liquor for him. I'm signalin' him to fetch 'em off."

The lighthouse stood up like a great finger thrust up against the blue sky, and the *Queen*, grunting and groaning, waited for the boat which showed like a speck of white upon the tawny water. Captain Hatterby and Jack Seward watched its approach, and the latter made a mental comparison of the lighthouse-keeper's life and the life which he, Seward, had lived for the preceding five months.

"I wonder what he'd think of the proposition I've just turned down," he said, addressing Hatterby. "He's got only a five-hundred-yard radius on that island, and he only sees a visitor once in three months."

"An' old Harry's girl has to stand it too," said the captain. "Harry has his daughter with him on Cardui."

"His daughter?" cried Seward.

"Yep," growled the captain, leveling his glasses at the approaching boat. "Little Marcie Derron, the sweetest—Catamounts an' crullers! It's the little girl that's pullin' out to us now!"

The two men watched the rowboat approaching the tramp steamer. Nearer and nearer it came, a shower of diamonds falling from the oars as they rose from the water. The captain was right. A girl of about twenty years sat in the boat and drove it steadily forward.

The boat rounded the stern of the steamer, and Jack Seward saw the face of the girl. It was a wonderful face. Her eyes were league-deep wells of light like the eyes of the peri in whose depths Mohammed saw his victories. Her mouth was a little scarlet opening through which tiny pearls showed hesitatingly, while the masses of coppery hair were fused into a golden aureole for her shapely head. And with her beauty and charm she showed a confidence in herself and an ability to handle the boat that amazed Seward.

The ex-mate watched her as she chatted to Captain Hatterby, the boatswain of the *Queen* lowering down to her the little gifts which the captain of the tramp brought to his old-time friend. The girl explained that her father was sick, and the simple statement startled Jack Seward.

"And is there no one else on the island?" he asked.

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"Oh, yes," answered the girl. "We have an assistant, Crazy Tom."

"Is he as loony as ever?" asked Captain Hatterby.

"I think he's worse," said Marcie Derron, her red lips parting in a quaint smile. "He told me yesterday that a sea-devil came up every night out of the ocean to drink the lamp-oil."

A little thrill of horror seized Seward. He looked at the sweet-faced girl, then at the lonely white finger thrust up against the blue sky. He contrasted this plucky little American girl with the artificial, scheming ladies who had sought to entrap him in New York.

For a minute he was deaf to the conversation; then he noticed that the transfer of the gifts was complete and that the girl was tendering her final thinks to Hatterby.

"Good-by, and a thousand thanks, captain," she called out. "Dad will be so pleased with your presents."

The oars dipped, the girl leaned back to the stroke, and her sweet, gentle face was turned upward toward the deck on which Seward was standing. And that vision of moist lips and fathomless eyes upset John Allington.

"Wait!" he cried. "Wait!"

For an instant he stood clutching the rail as the girl stopped rowing. A mad desire came to him to offer his services to the girl, to help her nurse her father and boss the crazy man who saw the sea-devils, then common sense fell upon the quixotic idea and he was himself again.

"What is it, Seward?" asked Captain Hatterby.

"I—I," stammered the ex-mate. "Why I—I want to give—to give Miss Derron a little present for her father."

It was with a great feeling of relief that he remembered the basket of delicacies which he had sent the taxi chauffeur to buy on the night he had run away from New York. He had forgotten the parcel in the excitement of his first days at sea and he dashed madly to his cabin and returned carrying it in his arms. He hastily tied a rope to the handle and lowered it over the side.

"A little gift from me," he cried. "Please take it."

"Oh!" cried the girl, as the contents of the basket came into view. "Oh, what beautiful things! You are robbing yourself!"

"No, no!" cried Seward. "I'm delighted to have had it. Please accept it! Please!"

Marcie Derron cried out her thanks again and again, and Jack Seward blushed like a schoolboy as he listened. There was some magic in her voice that he could not fathom, some witchery in the big eyes that were upturned to his as she pulled away from the side of the steamer. The heir to old Dan Seward's dollars felt that the girl's eyes were mirrors in which he saw the whole world. In them, as he looked down at her, he saw little magic spots whose lure had come to him in the hot nights in New York when the gods of the Long Trails had gibbered at his shackles. He saw the rice-white beaches of Samoa, the pandanus palms moving softly against skies of Persian blue, the shifting panorama of the Apollo Bundar at Bombay, the tawny sands that stretch back from the shores of the Red Sea to the Nile. In that instant he saw all the wonder places that he had ever visited.

Captain Silas Hatterby roused John Allington Seward from his day-dream when the little boat was a white bead upon the ocean between the tramp ship and the lighthouse.

"Some girl," said old Silas.

"Why, why," stammered Seward, "she's the sweetest girl I ever saw!"

"She is," said the captain, looking slyly at the young man. "I bet if a man married Marcie Derron he could live on a desert island and——"

"Captain," interrupted Seward, "she shouldn't be alone on that place with a sick father and a crazy man. Why I—I——"

"Well," said Hatterby, as the ex-mate paused.

"I should have gone off with her! Don't laugh, confound you! Where do you call next?"

"Galveston."

"Galveston! And she'll be alone with a sick father and a crazy man till I get there!"

"Till what?" growled Captain Hatterby.

"Till I get there!" cried Seward. "I'm going back to that lighthouse the moment this dirty old ocean trollop gets close enough to shore to let me jump off! Don't talk! I've made up my mind."

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III

TWENTY-THREE hours after the *Queen* docked at Galveston, John Allington Seward stepped from the train at a little siding in Florida and inquired how far it was to the coast near Cardui Light.

"Thirty-five miles," answered the station agent, "an' they're long miles at that."

"How will I get there?"

"Stranger," said the agent, "I'm paid fifty per for this job, but if I could answer questions like yours I'd ask five hundred."

"But how does any one get there?"

"No one goes."

After a pause the station agent spoke.

"Ike Slocum down the road has got something that he calls an ottymobile, but it isn't. If you want to get to the coast, see Ike. You mightn't get there, but Ike's got a lot of belief in that machine."

John Allington Seward interviewed Mr. Slocum, and Mr. Slocum led him out to inspect the machine.

"What make is it?" asked Seward.

"The One and Only," answered Slocum. "I built it myself."

Jack Seward walked slowly around the machine. He shook it and it rattled fearfully.

"Easy, easy," muttered its owner. "Seems as if you've been used to wrestlin' with grizzlies. The machine ain't done yer any harm."

"But will it stand the trip?" asked the ex-mate.

"It's never been," said Mr. Slocum cautiously, "but if you leave off shakin' it we'll try."

Visions of the sweet face of Marcie Derron came up before John Allington Seward as he looked from the One and Only out across the lonely stretch of flat unwholesome country that lay between him and the coast. Thoughts of the crazy man who imagined that a sea-devil drank the lamp-oil rose up and tormented him. He tried to put them away, but the picture he had formed of Crazy Tom would not be thrust into a corner of his brain. It sprang out from time to time and led legions of fear demons through his mind.

"I'll hire you," he said, turning to Slocum. "Get a move on as soon as you can."

The One and Only got under way with a great burst of speed, but it soon developed all the troubles which automobiles are heir to. It was the most temperamental machine ever constructed, and they had not proceeded more than five miles from the railway line before John Allington Seward rose and cursed it roundly. The machine, coughed, spluttered violently, backed in a reckless manner and then made an ineffectual attempt to climb a peaceful and inoffensive tree.

Slocum spent three hours in a futile effort to find the cause of the trouble, and then, quite inadvertently, he touched a red button which Jack Seward thought was a decoration. The machine emitted a violent snort and sprang forward while the two men were on the ground. Slocum dashed madly after it, clutched the back seat, dragged himself aboard and managed to regain control before the machine could hurl itself into a swamp for which it was heading. Fear crouched in his eyes as he turned and spoke to Seward.

"She sometimes does that," he announced nervously.

"Does she?" growled the ex-mate. "Well, what she wants is an anchor, son. Let her go and see if she was bluffing or if she really means it."

The One and Only traveled a mile and then developed internal troubles that defied Slocum's remedial measures for six hours. It began to rain. The evening closed in wet and dark, and the low-lying road became a quagmire.

"If the water gets a little higher, she might float," snarled Seward. "She'll be drowned if she waits here much longer."

The automobile, as if frightened by the ex-mate's remark, began to crawl forward and Seward spoke again.

"For the love of heaven, don't let her stop!" he cried. "Promise her anything—a year's rest, oil and gasoline, anything!"

The machine covered three miles at a slow gait, then some internal organ signified its displeasure by making the sound that we associate with the appearance of a cuckoo from the insides of a Swiss clock. There followed an ominous clucking as if a referee piston were counting ten, then a great silence fell upon the car, a silence broken only by the rain-drops pecking at the tin hood.

Jack Seward sprang into the roadway, thrust some bills into the hand of Ike Slocum and spoke commiseratingly.

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"I'm sorry for you," he said. "She's your work and you can't go back on her, but I can. I'm going to walk."

"You'll never get there," said Slocum. "There's too many marshes."

"I'll do it," said the sailor. "I've got to do it!"

And John Allington Seward did. Long past noon on the following day he broke through a belt of scrub and looked at Cardui Light some two miles off the beach down which he stumbled wearily. It still appeared as a big white finger, but he thought now that it beckoned to him.

Big waves were rolling in from the Atlantic; great white-hooded combers that flung themselves like drunken things upon the sands. A wrinkled fisherman sat upon an upturned boat and gazed at the rollers with a curious, wistful expression.

"I want to get out to the lighthouse," said Seward.

"Can't," said the fisherman.

"Why?"

"Sea too high."

"Nonsense! I'll give you five dollars."

"No, sir."

"Ten!"

An expression of cupidity passed over the wrinkled face of the man but he glanced at the sea and the look of covetousness disappeared. Into Jack Seward's brain the mental picture of Crazy Tom sprang again as the loneliness of Marcie Derron was made more apparent by the fisherman's reluctance.

"Twenty dollars!" he cried, gripping the shoulder of the wrinkled one. "Twenty and I'll row! Come!"

It was a mad, wild pull to Cardui Light but Jack Seward was a seasoned athlete and an experienced seaman. The big green combers tried to upset the little boat but Seward's strategy was too much for them. The wrinkled fisherman marveled at the strength and skill displayed by his passenger.

The white finger came closer, closer. The fisherman cupped his hands and shouted directions.

"There's a little cove ahead of you!" he shouted. "Pull for your life!"

Jack Seward pulled. He drove the boat forward, held her to it when a fierce current tried to drive him on the rocks, then riding a big wave he sent the little boat into the sheltering cove and, springing out, dragged it up a tiny strip of white sand that was surrounded by boulders.

"A tough pull," he shouted to the trembling fisherman. "If we——"

Seward paused in the middle of his remark. From somewhere above him came the faint cry of a woman, followed by a yell of rage that was caught up by the wind and carried off to sea.

JACK SEWARD forgot the fisherman. He dashed madly up the rocky slope, stumbling and slipping on the spume-swept boulders. He reached a flat rock and paused for an instant to survey the little circular island in the middle of which Cardui Light stood. The lighthouse itself was not more than sixty yards from the spot where he was standing, but he could see no one.

For a minute he stood without moving, then the scream of a woman came again to his ears and he saw. He caught a glimpse of a white figure moving from the lighthouse toward the sea at a point to the right of his position, while in pursuit, his form and face clearly outlined against the leaden sky, was a huge, red-headed man who leaped from rock to rock with the sureness and swiftness of a mountain goat.

Jack Seward imitated the movements of the red-headed person in his efforts to intercept him. He took chances of breaking his neck in his mad desire to head him off, and the ex-mate of the *Queen of the Rovers* was successful. He came between Marcie Derron and Crazy Tom, the assistant, when the latter was within ten feet of the girl of whose face Jack Seward had dreamed dreams since the morning he first saw her.

Crazy Tom stopped abruptly; then he opened a huge mouth and laughed uproariously.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he roared. "I've got you at last! You're the bad devil that's been comin' up out of the sea every night to drink the lamp-oil! Now, I'll kill you!"

He made a wild charge at Seward and a little cry of fear from the lips of Marcie Derron rang out above the crazed man's laughter.

Jack Seward's jaw was set as he stood awaiting the attack. The bounding madman was upon him before he moved; then with a surprisingly swift movement he shifted his body to the left and swung a

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terrific right at the crazy man's jaw. It landed squarely. Redhead staggered, rocked backward and forward for half a minute, then dropped full length upon the stones.

From behind a boulder stepped Marcie Derron. She advanced slowly and took Jack Seward's hand.

"Thank you," she said.

IV

IN THE days that followed that memorable afternoon when Crazy Tom thought he had discovered the sea-devil who drank his lamp-oil, John Allington Seward practically took charge of Cardui Light. He shipped Crazy Tom to the mainland, arranged for a substitute to take his place, and he proved himself such an efficient doctor that Marcie Derron's father became well and strong under his treatment. And the wonder eyes of the girl thanked him as he labored.

"If you hadn't come!" she cried once when a vision of the pursuing madman swept the color from her cheeks. "He had been crazy for years, but we thought he was harmless. It was the notion about the sea-devil that made him chase me that day. And if you hadn't been there——!"

"Don't think about it," said Seward quietly. "I was there so why should you worry?"

"But—but," she stammered, "why—why should you——"

She paused and a look in the eyes of Jack Seward made her turn and walk with rosy face from the room.

Old Harry Derron was grateful to the younger man. He was puzzled as to why Seward left the *Queen of the Rovers* at Galveston to come overland to the lighthouse, but he asked no questions.

Seward had been two weeks on Cardui Light when he put his fortune to the test. It was on a glorious September afternoon that he sat with Marcie Derron on one of the big rocks near the spot where he had knocked down Crazy Tom, and there with the Western sunlight upon their faces the man told the maid of his love. He wooed her as a sailorman, a sailorman without a ship, but her love for him was great, and when he made his simple declaration she put her little hand in his big palm and sighed softly.

"I love you, Jack," she said gently. "I think—I think I loved you when you lowered the basket from the deck of Captain Hatterby's ship."

He kissed her then and they sat talking in the soft glow of the afternoon. Far to the southward a white speck showed clearly, a steam yacht creeping up the coast from Havana.

"Where will we live, Jack?" asked the girl. "I mean after—after we are married."

"Anywhere!" cried Seward. "Any place in the world will be heaven if you are there with me!"

"Oh, Jack!" she cried joyfully. "I was afraid, Jack, that you wouldn't like to live in the place that I'm dying to live in. And it's so good of you to say you will."

"What place is that?" he asked.

"New York!" she cried, her fragrant breath upon his cheek as she turned toward him. "New York, Jack. It's the one big dream of my life to go there and to walk up and down the avenues and to see the pretty women and the stores, and the restaurants, and—oh, Jack, what's up?"

John Allington Seward had risen to his feet and was staring at the speck of white gradually growing larger.

"What day of the month is it, Marcie?" he cried, anxiously.

"The sixteenth," answered the girl. "Jack! Jack! What's wrong?"

"Why, Marcie," he cried, "if—if I can get to New York before the twenty-first I'll keep the cats from getting my money! And I will! I will!"

Hurriedly he told her of the will of Uncle Dan Seward, and the clause which made it impossible for him to leave New York for more than one calendar month, and Marcie Derron listened open-mouthed to the story.

"We can't go by land!" cried Seward. "It's a forty-mile walk. But if I can stop that yacht, we'll get there in time. And I can stop her! I can!"

"But Jack, do you want to live in New York?" said the girl.

"Do I?" he shouted, as he pushed the little boat into the water. "Why, Marcie, it's the one spot in the world I want to live in now that I've got you! It was a lonely spot when I was alone, but with you— Go and pack some things, Marcie! This

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yacht is going to take a couple of passengers off Cardui Light!"

It was the yacht *Scallywag* belonging to the Honorable Francis Leicester Nevison that Jack Seward held up off Cardui, and it was to the Honorable Francis that Seward put his request for a passage to New York for himself and Marcie Derron.

"Why, certainly!" cried the yacht-owner, when the reasons had been explained fully. "What a jolly funny will the old chap made! Bring the young lady aboard and my wife will look after her. I'm awfully pleased to have the opportunity to help you out. A fearfully jolly joke on the cats, isn't it? A deuced cat catastrophe! Eh, What!"

Old Martin Treves of Treves, Ballyman & Hobley was astonished on the evening of the nineteenth to receive a wireless message from the yacht *Scallywag* off Sandy Hook. The message read:

Changed my mind. Will dock eight o'clock tomorrow morning. Please meet me at Quarantine and bring clergyman with you. The tabbies will have to wait.

JOHN ALLINGTON SEWARD.

"Why, God bless my soul!" cried old Martin Treves. "God bless my soul! Did I ever hear anything like that!"

He picked up a book which he had thrown down in disgust just before he received the message. He turned over a few pages and found a paragraph which he read carefully.

"And I thought all that flipflop stuff here was foolish," he murmured. "It's true! This idiot of an author knew! He wrote it down here." And then in a strained squeaky voice the venerable Martin Treves read aloud this sentence:

A woman's eyes are mirrors in which a man can see the whole world if love is the telescope through which he looks.

"It's a remarkable case," murmured Treves, putting down the book. "A very remarkable case."

WHEN THE BASS STRIKES

by GEORGE L. CATTON

DRAT the flies and mosquitoes! That sun's hotter than hades.
And look at the weeds—like a mat at the door!
And the wind in the east; it will rain in an hour,
And me with rheumatics behind and before!
Now my pipe has gone out and I haven't a lucifer,
And it's all of a mile to my source of supply.
The guy who advised me to come up here fishing
Will need to buy beefsteak to put on his eye.
Hello! A strike! Zip! Got you!

Look at him rise! Whew! A good fat four-pounder.
Or I don't know a bass from an eel or a ling!
Pull you black devil and wear out your temper!
The hook's in your jaw clear up to the ring.

Heigh-ho, for the camp in the shade of the balsams.
It's going to rain? I don't give a durn!
I've got wich-hazel to rub my rheumatics,
And besides there's my raincoat tucked up in the stern.
My hands are all blistered from sinking the paddle.
They'll heal in a week if I dope them at night.
The guy who advised me to come up here fishing
Is a pretty good scout, and he knows where they bite.
Hello! A match! Crack! Got you!

Puff—puff! And the world's all right

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Wine of the Wilderness

By George Warburton Lewis.

Author of "Trailing the Jungle Man."

THE American surveyors, sun-bronzed and profane, had come and gone, leaving behind them in the jungle a broad, ragged swath and a level line of stakes that wound away interminably. When the last invading gringo had disappeared, the great silence crept back like a thing of life and settled as before upon the vast wilderness.

Peace reigned for a space; then a mighty uproar, not unlike the tumult of an invading army, smote the stillness along the swath. When the cyclone of sound and movement had passed, wondering jungle folk, separated by league-long intervals, beheld, instead of the long line of stakes, two rusty ribbons of steel; and these the strange-mannered invaders called a railroad.

The new line had been laid within a stone's throw of a jungle-screened, thatched hut—a solitary habitation squatting beside a crystal brooklet that came tumbling down out of a wooded, shadowy mountain.

So intent had been the wonderful builders upon their work that they had labored rapidly past the thatched hut apparently without once suspecting its hiding-place. And all the while I had waited in my retreat, a mere nest in the jungle, brushed at intervals by the enormous locomotives that had voyaged from the distant north to smash the virgin stillness with their frantic snorts. Waited had I with a great fear gripping my heart.

But now at the end of what seemed a long eternity the man-menace appeared to have passed, and, as far as I had been able to ascertain, none of the unwelcome visitors knew of the existence of the hidden hut—*La Casa Escondida*, as Lolita liked to call it. And Lolita, know ye, was the treasure I guarded.

I have let you into the secret at the outset—the secret of a mysterious spell that nature and her jungle confederate put upon a strong man—a passion as tempestuous, as inexplicable, and as enduring as the rock-boned mountains in whose shadow the little drama had its setting.

Picture a giant six feet three, just under the two-hundred mark, and thirty, and that's me—Ralph Conroy. Picture also, a fellow who has never been worth a farthing to himself or to the world in general and whom the competition of intensive civilization has driven out to the uninhabited places, and again that's me—ungrammatical, black sheep, soldier of fortune, and all that, yet habited still in some of the tattered vestments of honor and correct breeding that will cling to a fellow after careful, if well-nigh forgotten tutoring. You see I am going to be perfectly frank with you.

When my eyes first fell upon Lolita I was a starving gold-hunter, reduced, but for a solitary tin of sardines, to an empty grub-kit. She was standing knee-deep in the silvery water of the little stream that

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laughed and sang to her all day long, washing her hair.

That hair was a revelation. It fell to her well-turned ankles and it was as black as a raven's wing. I considered calmly from my point of espial that it was more beautiful than anything I had ever seen in nature; but then I had not yet seen her face.

I took care that my maiden of the mountain should not surprise me watching her; and watch her I did for more than ten minutes in silent admiration. Then she turned toward me without the least sign of surprise and laughed. My wonderful water-nymph had tricked me. She had been conscious of my presence all the time. She told as much, and I thought it little short of necromancy. I had unwittingly touched a bush and she had caught the reflected movement in the transparent water of a little pool.

She had the alertness of a fawn. I saw in her satin skin the faint, brown-red flush of her vanished Indian forebears; and I was sure that that flush deepened a little as I stood in amazement, perhaps a trifle too intently studying her. Her suppleness and grace fascinated me, and I stared as I might have stared on first beholding an unusually beautiful fawn.

She was a wonderful wild animal, yet that was not all. I might go on *ad infinitum* telling you of my wonder-girl and of the hypnotic manner in which she affected me, but I fear that even then you would not comprehend. I can only aver that all my years of wandering had never before gladdened my *blasé* eyes with such an entrancing spectacle.

She went on laving her luxuriant hair, smiling and answering my doubtless incoherent questions in scholarly Spanish, and looking incredibly like some forest naiad that had risen from the water of the brook in which she stood.

I WAS so starved and exhausted that it required some days of her father's rude hospitality to bring me around to my old self. I frequently surprised her watching me curiously, about equally divided, I judged, between amusement and amazement—amazement always getting the better of it when I ate.

I knew that she secretly revelled in an inadvertency I developed for bruising my hapless head on the low rafters of the miniature dwelling that was her home. She made no attempt to excuse the frugal fare which I was only too glad to share in the circumstances. Coarse as were the comforts of this wilderness abode, it was undoubtedly all my wonder-girl had ever known, and, as everything is known only by comparison, she had no way of understanding that there was anywhere anything better than she saw in her surroundings.

What puzzled me most was her wonderful mind. Her face was a true mirror of her emotions, and how radiant with expression it was! Her eyes were the playground of myriad flashing lights that gave one the impression of lambent flame.

I had supposed her to be wholly illiterate until I found one day in the shade of a great mango-tree a dog-eared Spanish grammar lying open on the ground beside her hammock of woven reeds. The worn pages of the old volume clearly indicated the student's progress. Thus it was obvious that somewhere, somehow, my wonder-girl had mastered the rudiments of book-lore.

The most recent thumb-marks in the grammar showed that she had been probing the complexities of the subjunctive mood. That such things should capture the interest of one reared in that wild environment, surprised and puzzled me. My judgment of Lolita was already more than vindicated. I had known from the first that she was no ordinary jungle girl. I knew her now for one of those unexplainable prodigies that God regularly apportions, I have heard, to every million square miles of waste and wilderness.

One day while pursuing a tapir a few miles down the stream that waters the little valley of my adventure, I made the appalling discovery that the builders of the railroad had not yet all departed.

I was not a little startled and dismayed to come suddenly upon a gang of babbling negroes at work in a cut. They were engaged in clearing away a landslide that obstructed the rails. I noted that the gang was a mixed one, composed of various nationalities. I watched them from the cover of the dense jungle as they pursued their labor.

I was amused in spite of my anxiety at the babel of tongues in which the shovel-plying brown and black men alternately bandied vulgar jokes and cursed, their

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only known form of diversion. After all, these great, muscular fellows were but children mentally. Surely I had nothing to fear from them.

I was on the point of banishing my anxiety with the self-assurance that the rough, half-civilized *cuadrilla* knew nothing of the existence of my wonder-girl, when I caught a remark that rooted me in my tracks and took my breath away. It came from the foreman of the gang, a gigantic Barbadian, and the words that fell from his sneering, malformed lips framed an unspeakable insult to the flower-like maiden I already loved.

The coarse jest provoked a great laugh, and I was therefore certain that my secret, so long inviolate, had at last been profaned by prying Ethiopian eyes; that Lolita had been discovered and maybe watched or insulted, in spite of my unflagging vigil.

Had the foreman been alone I should have attacked him then and there and trusted to luck, for a consuming passion was upon me; but in the circumstances it would have meant suicide, and this at a time when Lolita stood most in need of my protection. So I stole away into the jungle fastness with a heavy heart, careful not to betray my presence to the rude fellows who had in that moment unwittingly become my enemies.

After that painful incident I locked the door of my hut, shouldered my rifle and went on watch in the thick-set jungle that ringed Lolita's hut round like a wall. She never went to the near-by brook to fill a gourd with water but that I crept noiselessly after her, silent as the jungle shadows, alert as a she-panther guarding her young. And when in the brooding silence of the long, sultry afternoons she lay in her reed hammock and poured over the absorbing contents of the dog-eared grammar, she was never alone as she supposed.

Then one day, as I crouched in concealment in the matty jungle with my rifle composed across my knees, I suddenly became aware of an indescribably queer sensation. It was a strange consciousness that I, the watchman, was being watched.

I turned my head and there, at twice an arm's reach, I beheld a strange gaze bent upon me. So skilfully concealed was the unknown spy that only his eyes—great piercing orbs with wide margins of white ringing the pupils—were visible through the labyrinthine network of vine and bush.

I brought my rifle round tentatively, and simultaneously the white-ringed pupils disappeared. I listened tensely but could detect no sound to indicate the withdrawal of the interloper. After a moment I decided to carry the war into the enemy's country; so, holding my rifle ready for use, I gradually worked my way to the point where I had surprised the peering eyes.

All that remained of the mysterious prowler were his footprints, and they were quite distinct on the damp mold of the shaded earth; also they were so enormous that my own ample brogans little more than two-thirds filled them. I was convinced that I had been spied upon by the giant negro foreman whose gross insult to the jungle child-girl I was still burning to avenge.

I asked myself what dark purpose could lie behind the negro's surreptitious visit here. I was morally certain that he had been watching my wonder-girl as well as spying upon me, and the conviction increased the feeling of anxiety and dread that weighed upon my heart.

IT HAPPENED on a Sunday afternoon. For hours I had been perched high among the thick-leaved branches of a great mango tree, keeping up my interminable round of sentry duty, which had by this time begun to leave great hollows in my cheeks and about my eyes.

Twenty yards below me, at the spring, Lolita was filling a calabash with water. Weary with long watching and loss of sleep, I must have dozed for a moment in my vigil. At any rate I did not see him, the bestial negro foreman, until he had come quite close to the object of his visit—my wonder-girl.

Although I had often pictured in the monotony of my watching just what I saw below me now, the cold, staring reality none the less gave me a start. I felt my heart quicken tumultuously and something burned in my brain like a live coal.

The negro had stolen up smiling, yes, smiling; but I still pray God to shut out that smile from my mental images until the memory of it shall have faded forever.

The girl did not see him until he addressed her with coarse familiarity, offering to fill the calabash. I noted in the brief

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seconds of my hesitation that she was not in the least alarmed. In her eyes and in her manner was the same sweet, guilelessness that had fascinated me at first.

I saw her thank the towering black for his kind offices, and then she would have gone on dipping up the water. But the brute seized her disengaged hand and drew her toward him, smiling again that terrible gorilla smile—a smile that was hideous with all the animalism inherited from countless generations of barbarians.

The rest was a kind of blur to me. I remember her dropping the calabash, the water sloshing out, her frantic but futile efforts to free herself, the sudden alarm in her eyes, the quavering, imploring notes of the sweet voice raised in supplication and terror.

Just how I got out of that tree I never quite knew. The human beast saw me as I leaped from under the low-hanging branches of the mango, and he saw too the rifle that I was raising to fire. His white-ringed eyes measured the rapidly narrowing distance that divided us.

I saw him release his swooning captive and plunge toward me like the primitive man he was. But I had not tramped half my life in wild lands for nothing. Already my trained eye had leaped along the sights and focused on the center of his broad chest, and, confident of the result, I pressed the trigger.

A sickening flash of horror enveloped me. I had barely time to realize that the cartridge had not exploded—old ammunition it was—and then what seemed a hurtling black mountain bore me to the ground. A flickering instinct of self-preservation, haply something that fast football had left with me, told me to roll from under my antagonist as I fell. It succeeded.

I was on my feet a single heart-beat in advance of the brute, my weapon clubbed. I swung unerringly for his woolly head as he rose, swung with the combined strength of desperation and despair, but the giant caught the blow lightly in the rubbery palms of his great hands. Moreover, he gripped the stock of the rifle like a vise, and in another instant he had torn it from my grasp with a shock that momentarily left me dazed, incredulous.

The brute grinned like some sooty imp of hell as he advanced upon me, the weapon grasped in his gorilla-like hands. I backed away, backed, by chance, toward the spring.

My jumbled thoughts told me that this was an inglorious way of passing out after the innumerable dangers I had survived. There was neither glamour nor romance in dying of a broken head. It was a death for dogs. And yet I knew in my heart of hearts that the end now so near would have been a million times less terrible of aspect had it not involved leaving my jungle girl at the mercy of a brute. My defeat meant too much. I must win this fight.

As I retreated I half turned, casting about warily for some weapon. And Providence, in that moment of crisis, provided it.

"*Tirele estas piedras!*" came a familiar voice, and Lolita glided toward me from the direction of the spring, undaunted, her small hands shaped into a basket that was heaped with sizable stones.

I snatched one and let fly, for the furious giant was swinging his clubbed rifle.

Ah, fortune danced fitfully back and smiled upon me momentarily once again, for my missile had struck the brute squarely on the top of his bullet-like head as he ducked instinctively. But instead of felling him like a beef, the blow only staggered him.

He dropped the rifle involuntarily and came on, snorting now like a mad rhinoceros. We met at the rock-rimmed edge of the spring.

I crouched and tensed every muscle for the impact of his rush, the impetus of which somehow catapulted him upward as our bodies met. The rest I could never explain.

I know I tried to turn my adversary as he shot like a meteor over my head, to prevent his alighting, cat-fashion, on all fours. In this I must have succeeded better than I had hoped, for, when I wheeled about expecting to meet a fierce enemy gathering for another onset, I saw instead, to my utter amazement, only a great motionless form stretched at full length across the course of the spring and damming up the crystal water. I noted that two tiny trickles of blood were creeping out of the wide nostrils and that the head rested, as if impaled, on a convex rock on which it had fallen.

Something prompted me to step over and raise the giant's belligerent poll from the oval rock on which it rested so—well, peculiarly, if you know what I mean. My God! The malformed, woolly head at the

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back was crushed as flat as the palm of one's hand. I had killed him!

I laid the impassive head back upon the rock and hesitated there like one in a trance, dully watching several little rivulets of dark blood that now began to worm their way out from under the crimsoning mat of wool.

The sweet girl for whom I had done this thing stood trembling beside me, dazed, uncomprehending, unable to grasp in so short a space the full significance of my act.

A feeling that was strange and awful grew upon me. I was aware of a vague and mind-filling uneasiness at being thus suddenly and unexpectedly harnessed with the weight of this new and whelming thing. But this mild torture was quickly succeeded by a great panic that surged up in my breast. It was the panic of fear, the overmastering force that can put armies to rout before imagined annihilation.

Heaven knew I had done no wrong. The hands of fate and circumstantial evidence seemed combining to make me an outcast; not an outcast by choice, such as I had been before, but a criminal outcast. Thirty miles is only a day's journey at most, and it was only that distance, I remembered, to Culebra and the yellow-uniformed Zone Police.

I recalled that I had once met several of those big-hearted ex-soldier men pleasantly. It had been on the occasion of an ill-starred gold hunt two years before, when I had crossed the Isthmus en route to Peru. I had had with me then a prize bloodhound pup, bought in New Orleans with a wee finger-stallful of yellow siftings from old Darién. The great pup had caught the fancy of the Canal Zone's cowboy Chief of Police, George Shanton, and, as the Canal Commission had just authorized the purchase of a pack of these animals, with which to trail and capture outlaws in the Panama jungles, the Chief generously bought the unbeautiful puppy, for the twofold purpose of increasing police efficiency and helping me on to Peru.

Why all this came back to me now as I stood there gazing down at the immobile bulk of that negro, I can not conjecture. Yet it did; and I wondered in a detached way whether Shanton had succeeded in training Jack, that awkward, lumbering puppy, to trail and make possible the capture of desperate and dangerous fugitives from justice.

A slight rustling sound among the bushes that flanked the spring caused me to turn a quick glance in that direction. What I saw was a hatless, wool-crested head just disappearing from view behind a cluster of Spanish bayonet. I reasoned that this second skulker would be a member of the dead Barbadian's track gang.

I felt that I was willing, in this awful crisis, to trust my case to judge or jury, to surrender myself to the Zone Police; but already I was beginning to realize that the real danger lay elsewhere, that the mixed gang of barbarians who had worked under this brute would stop at nothing to avenge what their unreasoning minds would tell them was his unprovoked murder.

I knew the men with whom I was dealing. I knew their easily fired hatred for the blond men of the North and I knew the inherited blood-lust that lurked in their black hearts. They were as dangerous as the tiger and as resourceful as the fox. They would invent a perfectly reasonable story of first-degree murder to lay before the police. From long and close contact with these island negroes I knew their incredible capacity to tell convincing lies.

I realized with a pang that the more certain safety lay in flight. Nor would I leave Lolita, though the enormous handicap of taking her cost me my life. I told her as much as we stood there together, irresolute in the shadow of my potential crime.

The look in her great liquid eyes shook me strangely. She was beginning now to appreciate the real peril of my situation.

I pressed her small red-brown hands in mine to reassure her and felt tremors of emotion ripple through her lissom body. All mendaciously I told her that this was only a little thing, that I should come out of it all right, but that, for the present, I should have to flee. She said with amazing finality that she would go wherever I went, and I knew that what she said was unanswerable, though her going would mean the severing of the one filial tie that had long held her a prisoner at *La Casa Escondida.*

I comforted her with the assurance that while man's hand was turned against me, God's would point the way. I told her that if she must go then we would trust to the jungle-bearded mountains that had been her playmates to hide us from the

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wrath of strange men; and she consented to this like the sweet, confiding child who believes always that one who is older and wiser, if he be friend, can do no wrong.

I recovered my rifle where my vanquished enemy, so lately throbbing with life and passion, had dropped it. Crushed between the sharp firing-pin and the unexploded primer was a twig from the mango tree from which I had scrambled down to the encounter. It was good to know that fate, and not bad ammunition, as I had supposed, had interfered to defer the negro's ignominious end.

I pondered the event deeply. I could almost believe that an unseen hand had played this trick that the black man's blood, morally, might not be on my hands. And, too, this undamaged ammunition meant added protection for my charge. I swore to her then and there, on my honor, that no harm should come to her while I lived.

THE parting at *La Casa Escondida* was not at all as most partings of that kind are. It happened at early dawn, while yet the deer and *conejo* were timorously poking their quivering-nostriled muzzles into view toward us from the cover of the surrounding jungle.

It was very still there in the little clearing by the hut. The lithe, middle-aged Indian who was Lolita's father stood very erect and looked eastward down the valley to where the advancing sun was projecting a golden corona above a cloudless horizon. And as he stood thus he laid a hand lightly on my wonder-girl's head and another on my own. His lips moved but I heard no word. Perhaps the Great Father whom he addressed understood none the less well.

After a moment he dropped his hands to his sides and, looking me straight in the eye, said simply:

"You saved her. You love her. She is yours."

I answered nothing. I had no words. The men I had known in the outside world had seldom trusted each other without reserve, and, doubting one another, there had been no mutual appeal to the sense of honor that but waits to be awakened in every nature. Here now was a man who, though he still worshiped strange gods, accepted me at face value, without arraigning an unindicted honor, confidently entrusting to me that which he held more sacred than his own life. Here at last in the heart of the jungle was a man who would meet his fellow man half-way.

And he should see that in my case he had made no mistake. No near-Indian of the deep jungle should outdo Ralph Conroy at the honor game.

And so, with the jungle-dweller's blessing upon our heads, Lolita flung back a kiss at *La Casa Escondida* and we swung away, hand in hand. The vivid green walls of the jungle, dew-drenched and dripping, encompassed us like a vast blanket soaked in perfume, swallowed us up and took us for its own.

Three days later we had climbed to within a mile of the two green summits of Las Tijeras, or Scissors Mountain, so called because its twin peaks look for all the world like the half-open blades of the useful household articles they resemble. Beside a garrulous little stream that leaped from rock to rock on its fretted course down the shaded mountainside, midway between the lean peaks of Las Tijeras and shut out from the nether world by the wonderful virgin forest, we had made camp.

I had built a hut for my companion with no better tool than a dull machete. My wonder-girl occupied this shelter while I bivouacked in the open, the better to be always on guard; for, although we had crossed numerous streams in our flight, I well knew it was anything but easy to throw well-trained bloodhounds off a scent.

The days passed. I hunted *venado* and *conejo* or gathered wild fruits, and Lolita studied her grammar. I rarely ever left her alone.

At night I guarded her as a soldier guards an army, and while I slept during the day she was the sentinel who watched over me. Thus the weeks went over our heads, but the black enemy came not.

There was wild game in abundance for our larder, and fruit and root things were also plentiful. With the lapsing days the danger of discovery seemed to grow more and more remote, and, in spite of the fact that I was a hunted man and that my life was never for a moment out of jeopardy, I was for some unaccountable reason happier right there in that limitless expanse of desolation than I had ever been before in my life. And the risk, never one whit reduced, did not explain the reason.

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It was difficult for me to realize that the secret of the happiness for which I had unavailingly explored about two-thirds of the globe, was an unsophisticated, seventeen-year-old, jungle-bred maiden of Indian ancestry. But the incredible fact stared me in the face so convincingly, so unescapably, that I suddenly burst out laughing and sought my naive enchantress in her woven-reed hammock, browsing through the inevitable dog-eared grammar.

I had toiled up this lofty mountain, I reflected, with all these treasures of hers on my aching back, and I had actually enjoyed the aches. Her hammock I had swung under a false banyan tree, whose deep shade the sinking, magnified sun was now beginning to dissipate with fading streamers of gold. They touched the rounded cheek of the pretty student and heightened the pink flush that ever abode there, telling of full-blooded youth and health.

I approached without sound but she divined my presence and turned her distracting face to me with a smile. At that moment it occurred to me, strangely enough, that I had never yet kissed the girl whom I had loved so long. When I spoke to her my changed voice startled her. It faltered and broke like the voice of a schoolboy.

"I have come to tell you what a miraculous change you have brought into my life," I managed to say. "I have come to offer you my love."

I had expected her to show surprise at my frank proposal, but I was disappointed. To her I had been always "Don Ralph," and thus she addressed me as, arching her smooth brows, she extended a dimpled hand and cried out with a tinkly little laugh:

"Why, Don Ralph, I have never imagined anything else than that you loved me!"

She sat up in her hammock as if mildly alarmed, as if beset with some vague fear that I had come to disavow instead of proclaim my love. Nothing could have been more opportune, and as I pressed her soft lips for the first time I felt her arms steal about my neck in a love as pure as that so expressed by affectionate little children. I knelt beside the hammock, gazing into the mirrors of her marvelous eyes.

"Nothing shall ever part us," I told her. "You have brought an incredible thing into my life. You shall always be my wonder-girl, and, God willing, you shall be my wife!"

When I would have risen, she would not release me, but clung to my neck, showering velvety kisses all over my face. The bands of sun-gold became attenuated bright-ribbons that plashed their subdued yellow radiance tantalizingly on her white teeth as she gleefully put forth her supple girl's strength against my escape. Before God, I had never seen a face cast in such perfect mold!

Again I caught the wonderful play of lights and shadows in her sparkling eyes—the indescribable something in them that came and went like many-hued sheet lightning. The straight, perfect nose, the subdued red bloom of cheek, the sensitive lips that, like her eyes, expressed mood, emotion, that seemed half coquettishly pouting at times behind their inherent smile—for an artist to have caught the ensemble would have brought him everlasting fame, just as it had opened a hitherto closed page of life to me. Blessed be the seeker after Adventure who findeth Life instead!

On the following day I was treated to the surprise of my life, nay, to several of them. I had been fortunate enough to catch several minnows in a still place in the stream, and, after dressing them in an old gold-pan which I had many times decided had too much sentimental value to discard, I could not resist the temptation to plunge into the cool, inviting water, fairly deep in places, and so escape the shriveling heat in a delightful, refreshing bath.

My ablutions finished, I waded back down the stream to the point where I had left my clothing and the gold-pan. Tingling with pleasant exhilaration, I sprang up the bank; then I stopped as suddenly as if I had unexpectedly encountered a stone wall. For a moment I could scarcely believe my eyes. Every stitch of wearing apparel that I had left on the rock had disappeared. There were the gold-pan and its contents undisturbed, but there was absolutely nothing besides.

At my wits' end, I pondered the ludicrous and annoying situation. Certainly there had been nothing in the quality of my plain raiment to tempt a thief; and though Las Tijeras had occasionally served as a retreat for escaped convicts and the like, there was not one chance in a thousand that such was the case in the present instance. The only inhabitants of Scissors

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Mountain at present, I had felt certain, were Lolita and myself, and my wonder-girl was wholly unassociable with any such escapade as this.

It occurred to me that some animal might be the culprit, and yet in that case, my hat, a shoe or some other garment would ordinarily have been left behind.

Involuntarily I began looking about, widening my range of vision among the undergrowth. My search was fated to be short.

Less than a stone's throw from the rock on which I had stripped for my bath, under the low-hanging branches of a mahogany tree I found the explanation. I came upon what resembled a tangled cone of varicolored snakes, a rumpled mass of textile on which white stripes stood out against a background of blue drill. It was a complete prison uniform belonging to the Zone Penitentiary at Culebra. Even the heavy brogans and the wide-brimmed straw hat were in evidence.

If you have ever come unexpectedly upon a human skeleton you can appreciate the inexplicable manner in which my discovery chilled me. It brought back to me afresh the near-obsession of which I had long tried in vain to rid my mind. It forced upon my resisting consciousness a terrible vision of the great stockaded prison at Culebra and presented anew the shocking picture of a crushed woolly head with red worms of blood creeping out from under a flat, ghastly wound at the back.

What more immediately concerned and puzzled me, though, was how to get to the hut and obtain other clothing unobserved. Some spirit of mischief counseled: "Put on this zebra outfit and give Lolita a start!" Surely there could be no harm in that. The late wearer of the garb that cried its sinister meaning from the house-tops, as it were, was undoubtedly far away by this time, and the Culebra police were, I shrewdly suspected, in a great flurry over his absence. Ha, those good-natured cops! Once I had had lots of fun selling them a pedigreed hound pup.

Ten minutes later I should scarcely have known myself in a mirror. The fit was not quite faultless. The tight shoulders of the blouse and the strained trousers-legs protested almost audibly against my greater stature, but I reasoned that anything was an improvement on stark nakedness.

I smiled inwardly at the spectacle I must have presented. I had not put on the shoes, as I had yet to cross the stream to reach Lolita's hut. Rolling the snug-fitting trousers as high as possible, I picked up the gold-pan and the hobnailed prison shoes and waded into the water.

The babbling, transparent flood reminded me that I was thirsty, so I stooped and began elevating the grateful elixir to my mouth with my free hand, the while standing knee-deep in midstream. The swift current had eaten a circular cavity in one side of the bank and the result was a shallow basin in which the water eddied lazily. The rays of the westering sun were slanting under a great guamo-tree that stood over the basin, and I noted, as my casual glance traveled over to the circling water, that something there was turning back the effulgent sun-rays in myriad needlepoints of yellow light.

I caught my breath and stared at the dazzling spectacle. It certainly had every appearance of the real thing. Still I could not conceive that that gravel-bed could be so richly sown with what looked startlingly like coarse gold. I stooped and scooped up a handful of the blue-gray sand and gravel from the pool.

Good God! It was so rich that dull-colored little flakes of gold stood up out of the mass. I sprang up, threw away the shoes and emptied my gold-pan of its dross contents, my hands shaking. That for which I had long since ceased to importune the unresponsive world had at last been laid at my very feet. I set to panning like mad, for mad indeed I was, raging once more in the ecstatic delirium of gold-fever.

The first pan left me a handful of crisp, crunchy little particles, two ounces at the very least. Why, this was incredible, preposterous—over two ounces to the pan and worth sixteen dollars an ounce! Thirty-two — sixty-four — ninety-six — my mind went leaping up dizzily to incalculable sums ere it suddenly occurred to me that this might be another of those disillusioning cases wherein the demand exceeds the supply. But no, the gods of miraculous luck kept faith.

The bottom of the four-foot gravel-bed panned richer than the top by four ounces to the take, and the crumbly, rotten bank that rose above it was unbelievably rich in outcropping terraced strata of the same

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character as the contents of the basin. I stood in the middle of the eddying pool and panned as I had never panned before, heaping the results of my labor on a clean flat rock at the lip of the basin.

As I panned there in feverish eagerness, something fell from the guamo-tree overhead and splashed into the water near me. So absorbed was I in my work that I took no notice of this, but a repetition of the occurrence a moment later drew my gaze to a guama-bean, a succulent and delicious fruit, that was circling about me on the languid eddy. What all at once fixed my eyes on the furry green pod, however, was the peculiar circumstance that it had been broken open and the edible pulp surrounding the seeds removed.

"A monkey," I mused, half aloud. "No other animal can husk them."

I may have been overjealous of my strike, but I felt that I did not even care to share the secret with a monkey. I had always thought of them as inquisitive, half-human things, capable of all sorts of unimaginable antics, and altogether undesirable trustees.

I worked on a little longer, but as the guama-husks continued to fall about me annoyingly my nerves presently revolted and I determined to frighten the gormandizer away. I provided myself with a light club as a precaution against his being of the larger species—and of the larger species he verily turned out to be.

When I had ascended above the first branches of the densely leaved guamo, I looked up. So great was the shock I received on the instant, I wonder now that I did not fall out of the tree. Dangling down from the thick foliage above me was a shod, human foot and the beginning of a leg that was encased in a russet pigskin legging—proof enough to convince any reasonable mind that he of the weakness for guama-beans was a full-size Zone policeman and not a monkey.

Of all wretched luck, mine was the most damnable. I feared now that I had been discovered along with my prodigious gold find; and yet the stranger in the tree had given no sign that he had caught sight of me. On the other hand, had he been aware of my presence under the tree he undoubtedly would not have discovered himself to me thus deliberately. Moreover, I considered, this outlandish garb—the brand of the convict—which I had donned in dire emergency, would have had much the same effect upon a Zone policeman as a red rag has upon a bull. If my reasoning was good I had not yet been seen. These thoughts flashing through my mind, in a measure resuscitated dying hope.

I descended noiselessly from the fateful tree, my nerves twangingly tense, my senses alert. I realized that, in the parlance of the checker game in which I was engaged, it was my move. The hut was less than a hundred yards distant, and I stole cautiously toward it. I had not advanced ten paces when, somewhere over to my right, somebody coughed.

I stopped short, my chest heaving. The old uneasiness, the abiding dread of the man hunted, stirred anew in my being. How had these indefatigable sleuths contrived to find my hiding-place?

In my confusion of mind I had forgotten the heaped treasure on the flat rock. The thought sickened me. It was like an invitation to the wide world to come and help itself. Yet in my extremity I could not risk going back. Chagrined and defeated, I continued on toward the hut, keeping well under cover.

Lolita was swinging gaily in her hammock, oblivious of the new and nearer danger. I got possession of my rifle without attracting her attention and slipped back into the maze of jungle as silently as I had come. An indefinable dread seemed to hamper my resolve to investigate.

It took me half an hour to locate the man who had coughed. He was standing in a depression, talking guardedly to some one beyond him whom I could not see. He was as black as soot and his peculiar British-colony brogue confirmed him as a Barbadian. In short, I easily recognized him after a moment as one of my natural enemies of the track-gang.

His clothing was stained green from the vegetation and snagged and torn as from a long journey through the ripping teeth of the jungle. Lean and dessicated, he looked like a prospector companion of mine had once looked some three days after our rations gave out.

I speculated on whom the wobegone-looking negro was talking with. A short detour satisfied my curiosity.

Fifteen yards below me in a sheltered ravine, with cocked Stetson pushed back on his dome-like head and a magazine rifle

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resting familiarly across his stocky legs, sat Colonel Bill Ervin. Enormous, red-mustached, red-goateed, and perspiring as always, though never seeming to grow less for it, he gradually came back to me from the land of hazy memory—the erstwhile commander of the Empire police district.

In point of fact, Colonel Ervin was not a colonel at all, but so versatile and picturesque was he that nobody ever thought of associating him with his official title. Throughout the length and breadth of the Panama country he was known as Colonel Ervin. "The friend of all heroic souls," he was a tower of efficiency and, withal, a planet that untoward circumstances had somehow forced out of its orbit. It calmed the wild throbbing in my bosom to see him here, and yet . . .

The uniform of the once dapper colonel, too, was torn and begrimed, and he, as well as the black, seemed to have undergone fearful physical hardship. His erstwhile rubicund face was shrunken and haggard. He was not the same Ervin I had met long ago on the Zone, the big ex-soldier who hailed from Texas and knew how to train trailing-dogs.

And while this recurring thought was still fresh in my mind, there ambled out from behind a clump of bushes the hugest, ugliest and most awe-inspiring specimen of the genus bloodhound I had ever laid my eyes upon. He was a tawny canine giant, somewhat bulkier than a month-old calf, and built on entirely different lines. His head was massive, and his great, bulging breast was nearly as broad as a man's. His pendulous, flabby upper lip hung far over his powerful lower jaw like a curtain, and his immense ears flapped at the sides of his head like capacious empty pouches. But impressive beyond all else were the eyes. Completely at variance with the savage nature of the animal they seemed; they were a dull gray, disproportionately small, and mild almost to expressionlessness. Unfamiliar with the curious breed, one might have thought the eyes diseased, for they receded far into the great head, and the lower lids, bloodshot and drooping, almost repulsed. The brute's forelegs were larger than my own wrists, and from his unbeautiful ears to his tenuous two-foot tail he was a mass of muscle.

Had Ervin reached over at that moment and raised the fan-like right ear of the big trailer I would gladly have given all the pannings I had garnered on the flat rock; for oddly enough, I recalled that Jack, the lumbering puppy that I had sold to the Canal Zone's Chief of Police nearly two years before, had had a circular white spot, a scald, under that particular ear. Yet it seemed hardly possible that the big, affectionate prize pup that I had impoverished myself to own, and been compelled to sell, could have developed into this terrible monster.

My speculation was suddenly cut short. As I leaned forward with eager interest, a dead stick cracked like the report of a pistol under my advanced foot. Instantly Colonel Ervin was on his feet, his calm blue eyes rummaging in my direction, his quick-firing rifle in the crook of his arm. Simultaneously the great dog lifted his muzzle and scented the air inquisitively. His keen olfactories would tell him that which his dull little eyes might not, and—damnation! Here was I still in this tell-tale convict's uniform! How many more nerve-straining situations was I to bring down upon myself? The rapid succession of events had given me no chance to get out of the accursed stripes which I had put on from necessity.

I crept away to the rear on all fours as noiselessly as a hunted fox, sensible that I wore now the hobnailed prison shoes which must betray me to the dog. Would to God I had left them where thrown in the moment of my distraction at the stream! These very shoes might mean the gallows for me.

The thought fanned the growing flame of terror in my breast. I knew that which many dog-experts know. A bloodhound, scented with some garment of the quarry, will follow and single out that quarry among a multitude. I realized that in the event that this ferocious trailer had been scented with some garment of the convict whose clothing I was unfortunate enough to be wearing—and everything pointed to this as being the case—it would be all day with me. But I kept my head.

A QUARTER of an hour later, with Lolita flying nimbly on ahead of me, I had picked up a disused trail far down the mountainside and was making good headway. My wonder-girl was not visibly frightened, but of course I had told

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her nothing of the bloodhound. Naturally she had no idea that fugitives were trailed with dogs, and it was because of such happy ignorance as this in many things that I loved her. The great outside world with all its evils was a closed book to her.

My heart was in my eyes as I watched her glide along. She was the agile wild fawn over again now. And, though I carried only my rifle and her much-prized grammar, I swear to you that I was hard put to it to keep up with her.

As we ran, I mentally prayed that the great hound might be kept in leash if we were to be trailed. The girl smiled back over her shoulder encouragingly as she flew along, and I, in turn, kept a sharp lookout to the rear, for some trailers do not give tongue.

I had already decided to shoot the dog if he came up with us, which he was sure to do, but what of Colonel Ervin and his unerring Winchester? And he had been a mighty good friend of mine, too.

"Boo-oo-oo-oo-n-g—boo-oo-oo-oo-n-g!"

Ah! There it was, already. The great beast had picked up the trail and was giving tongue like mad. I recognized the familiar booming cry of the bloodhound after quarry; and all who have heard that baying bellow, like which there is nothing else in the world, know that it is a mournful and horrifying sound. Somewhere in it there is a note that is strangely human in tone. It confounds like an accusing finger pointed at a guilty heart.

A mile further on when we had paused for breath we watched the pursuit file over a promontory half a mile to the rear. Ervin was being hauled along on the hard-strained leash like a schoolboy trying to hold a steer. It was a thrilling spectacle. A rod behind him trotted a long-limbed man in police khaki, while strung out in the wake of the latter I made out three wearily straggling negroes. Through the radiating heat-waves that tortured jungle life the advancing file resembled a string of exaggerated marionettes in motion.

"Why are they bringing that awfully big dog with them?" queried Lolita, shading the sun from her incredulous eyes with her hand.

Why, that dog—that dog——"

I stammered. But I could not look into her pleading, ingenuous eyes and tell her the lie that my lips had framed.

The ridge on which we stood sloped down to a shallow river, I remembered, and therein lay my only hope of throwing our pursuers off the trail. But I doubted that we could reach it in time.

When we had eased our aching lungs, we turned and raced on again with all the speed of our fast-ebbing strength. But another actor was suddenly given to the drama. If it had been a day of surprises, this was indeed a fitting culmination.

As we rounded a turn in the trail there came into view not five rods ahead of us another fleeing figure—a tattered negro who anon glanced backward over his shoulder with wild-staring white eyes and who, moreover, was wearing my clothes. Here, all unexpectedly, was the wretch who had added rue to my cup of bitterness; and he probably was a murderer into the bargain. Years ago I myself had been a police official, and the sense of duty that I had unconsciously acquired on the track of crime, came uppermost now.

"Stop!" I shouted after the flying black. "Stop or I'll stop you!"

But the fugitive was evidently tortured by visions of the grim, stockaded pen. He gave a quick half-turn as he ran, his hand flew up and something in it flashed in the sunlight and popped spitefully, whereat a missile displaced the air opposite my ear with a *whiff!*

"*Está disparando á ti,*" came a cry from Lolita in warning.

But the fact that he was shooting at me sufficiently advertised itself. My rifle cracked before I quite realized what I was doing, and with that the flying negro clapped his hand spasmodically to a leg and plunged down very abruptly in the trail. At the same time I caught the sound of a hurricane of cushioned footfalls behind me and swung round.

My miserable luck was still with me. The monster bloodhound had broken his leash and was racing down upon us with all the ferocity of a wounded cougar.

I flung up my rifle and pulled the trigger. Again fortune leered upon me hideously. This time the old ammunition had indeed turned traitor. I snapped the piece again and again without result.

The mighty animal came on pell-mell, a veritable prodigy of his kind. His head was low between his shoulders, his slender tail stood straight out, rigid, and his fan-like ears floated horizontally on the air-like

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triangular planes. Just below the right one I glimpsed a circular white spot! It was indeed Jack, the great, loose-jointed puppy that I had fed and fondled—that it had taken a brace of policemen to beat and drag away from me following his sale at Culebra twenty-two months ago. But he was a terrible picture of canine ferocity now.

He leaped high for my throat as he came up, but already I had played my final card, for I had shouted as nearly as possible in my natural voice—

"Behave, Jack, you rascal, behave!"

And then, as he rose from the ground, I added quickly, for fear had mastered me at the crucial moment:

"Down—Jack—for God's sake—down!"

Never shall I forget the miracle that followed. The great brute seemed to relax in midair. His hurtling body struck my chest with a shock that sent the breath out of me in a gasp. I went to the ground at full length, like one struck by a locomotive. I was mindful only of two friendly little gray eyes close above mine, eyes that were smiling and apologetic now, it seemed. A powerful foreleg was planted on either side of my chest, hot breath was on my cheek, and a great red tongue was licking my face gently in token of recognition and rekindled love. Jack, the prize puppy, bought in New Orleans with the wee poke of Darién dust, had, at the supreme moment, come over to his first master.

THE Canal Zone's cowboy Chief of Police leaned against a corner of Lolita's hut.

"Ervin and I came up the Chagres in a *cayuco* a week ago on what we feared was a cold trail. However, we brought along our crack trailer and the runaway's socks to scent him with. You see we had hardly figured on this scamp—the escaped convict—bein' on Tijeras. But I'd been itchin' to shine the eyes of some of these up-river 'gators, anyhow. If Jack hadn't accidentally picked up this cuss's trail, though—he killed an American foreman in the cut, you know—why, we'd have been huntin' 'gators yet and wouldn't have been lost, guides and all, all-same babes in the woods, and livin' on guama-beans!

"And if we hadn't got lost," he added after a thoughtful pause, "you'f never 'a' known out here when the Canal was finished! As things are," he pursued, "the case is as plain as the sunburn on Ervin's nose. The evidence is ready for the court, old fellow, and your exoneration's awaiting you. You see, Conroy, these three guides of ours witnessed your game fight with the foreman. You're a white man, barrin' a couple of years too near the Equator, and therefore these chaps'd have been against you, as you supposed, if the barbarian whose shell you cracked hadn't happened to be their own foreman and hence mighty unpopular with them. They reported the affair at Culebra station three weeks ago. They'd broken into your shack down below and got your name, and Ervin told 'em that if they didn't find you and bring you in, he'd—what was it—oh, yes, 'choke an African'—but never mind; maybe your stunning lady friend here savvies English."

Remembering something I had lately left on a certain flat rock, I slipped away, unheeded, leaving the angular police potentate gently delineating Lolita's initial lesson in English and the perspiring colonel stoutly asserting that "she'd have to speak that particular brand of English in Wyoming to be understood." When I returned, Ervin was waiting with a query.

"Why this Tijeras jaunt when you were in the right," he smiled, "and when you had a witness like this one—" he bowed to my wonder-girl—"with whom to sway courts and Canal Commissions?"

When I made no reply, my worldly-wise friend looked over at me comprehendingly. I was aware that I was shaking with a paroxysm of emotion. He stepped to my side and dropped a great consoling hand upon my shoulder.

"Old comrade," he said, "you've been imbibing too freely of this wilderness wine. It's gone to your head—you're drunk!"

I looked into the colonel's keen blue eyes and understood. My brain was reeling with the bewilderment of it all.

"It is a kind of—intoxication," I murmured. "But this magic wine of the wilderness has nevertheless given me love and riches—things that a whole life of the other kind could not bestow!"

With unsteady hand I drew from my pocket something that fixed the eyes of my auditors in an incredulous stare. It was a ten-ounce canvas bag, crammed to the drawstring with dull-colored, flaky gold.

As in a dream, I gazed down at the sweetly questioning face of my wonder-girl. Again

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the many-hued lights were dancing in her wonderful eyes. A smile that was as balm to my overwrought nerves lay on the crimson arch of her lips. She nestled closer to me, slipping her hand in mine confidingly, caressingly, after the manner of affectionate children.

Into my other hand a great, mild-eyed bloodhound had thrust his cold muzzle jealously. It was a wonderful moment.

As in a dream I heard my own voice.

"Lolita," it said, "we are going back to *La Casa Escondida* and daddy, and we are going to build on the site of that dilapidated hut the prettiest bungalow in Panama. The gold to do it with is under a certain guamo-tree, and all over this mountainside, and the new railroad will bring the material. There are only two other details, and I am going to leave them to Shanton.

"It's all right," laughed the Westerner with unerring divination. "I'll send out the first preacher I strike, if I have to hog-tie him and send him under guard, and I've decided to forestall any attempt to bribe an official by leaving Jack with you as a weddin' present in anticipation of the happy event."

A hush had fallen upon the mountain as we talked. The setting sun was flooding the shaggy green peaks of Las Tijeras with a radiance as of sifted gold. So healing, so strangely spiritual, so like some vast halo it was, that it seemed to rest upon the little group like a blessing.

The Misfit Turns Banker

by William H. Hamby.

Author of "The Harp on a Barbed Wire Fence," etc.

SIMPLEX COX was whistling because the sun was shining. At least there was nothing else for him to whistle about. Talk of the woes of a man without a country—his troubles are as a gnat to a wasp, compared to the man with a country but nothing to do in it.

Jobs had a way of vanishing before Simplex's eyes as if they were whisked away by a sleight-of-hand performer. He had some qualifications for any job, and had started in to do well at several, but circumstances had suddenly taken a turn; and when circumstances took a turn it invariably left Simplex on the steps outside, looking for some place to go.

It was late Summer and for three months—ever since he vanished from the wholesale vinegar business—Cox had been looking for an occupation. He was not looking for day's work, a day's work to him would have been merely taking medicine for headache—a very doubtful temporary relief. What he wanted was an occupation, a life-work, something he could stick to, and would stick to him.

He was not broke yet; still had three pieces of silver and two of nickel, but was reduced to that state where it is economy to walk from one town to another.

The sun was shining and the heat was broken by an early morning shower. The meadows were green with second growth, and the corn-fields and the trees, freshened by recent rain, looked good.

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Simplex swung along with a feeling of exuberance, a feeling that the hazy horizon concealed something good for him. Over yonder was another town, and Fate might have waiting there just the niche into which he would fit.

A horse's hoofs and the rattle of buggy-wheels made him look around and turn to the side of the road.

"Who-oa!" The driver pulled on the reins. "Going in to town?"

"Yes."

Simplex mounted to the seat, glad of the lift. The driver clucked to the horse and tapped him with the end of his whip. He was the sort of man who believes automobiles are ruining the country.

Simplex took a glance at him from the corner of his eyes. He was a man perhaps fifty-five years old, who shaved once a week and had his hair cut Spring and Fall. It was a good while since the last hair-cut and six days back to the last shave.

It was a safe guess the fellow was rich. He would accumulate money by mere inhibition; by inhibiting the wants of himself, his family and his family's families before they got to the spending-point. It was easy for him to convince people whatever they wanted they did not need. He could kill a little timid hopeful want by merely looking at it.

"Stranger in these parts?" The farmer scratched the end of his stubbly chin with the second finger of his left hand.

Simplex had been a "stranger in these parts" so often he was sensitive about it, and he had been asked that question so many times it made him nervous. But he was feeling communicative this morning and hopeful.

"Yes — at present," the young man nodded. "But I get acquainted easily. If I stop in a place forty-eight hours, the second morning I come down the street every one says: 'There goes Simplex Cox.'"

"Ahem! Gad-dap. My name is R. C. Ellison. Think of stopping around here?"

"Yes. I'm going into business at Elm Springs." Which was the town just ahead.

The farmer concentrated his attention on an ear of the horse for several minutes.

"What business?"

"I don't know," answered Simplex. "Depends upon which business in town first discovers what a valuable asset I'll be. You see I make friends faster than a dog-catcher does enemies. That quality is valuable to any business."

The farmer shook his head as decisively as if his wife had just asked for a new dress.

"Not the banking business."

"More valuable there than anywhere," asserted Simplex promptly. "There is more reason why a banker should be friendly than any other business man, for he makes his living by the customers favoring him with the free use of their money. There may be a crying need urging a man to the grocery or the clothing store; but neither hunger nor cold ever drove a man to deposit his money in the bank."

"Ahem! Gad-dap!" The farmer tapped the horse with the end of the whip.

"A bank that is friendly always puts the other one out of business." Simplex was looking to one side of the road to hide his grin. "I've seen it tried."

"Ever kept books?"

"Yes—some."

"Ever work in a bank?"

"No."

Silence until the country road began to dress itself as a street in the scattered outskirts of town.

"I've got an interest in a bank in the Springs here. The Pioneer Bank. Clelland says he's got to have a bookkeeper and assistant cashier. Had to fire the last fellow we had two months ago for makin' a bad loan. Lent old Bill Johnson twenty dollars, and he ain't good for a nickel—didn't even ask for security." His tone was incredibly resentful.

"Now I don't think Clelland really needs any help, but he's been cashier fifteen years, and I don't like to lose him. So if he has to have help, I guess we'll have to get somebody. There ain't none of these town fellows worth their salt, and they want big wages to start. What will you work for?"

He looked around at the young man, his small eyes daring him to think in big figures.

Simplex's heart took three big jumps. He had hunted a job so long that to have one really offered him was incredibly good luck. He knew he would like the banking business.

"What do *you* say?" he parried.

"Well—" the farmer-banker scratched the end of his chin again—"I'd say about twenty-five dollars a month to begin—from first to first of month—no four-week months go with me."

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Simplex studied a moment.

"What is your capital stock?"

"Ten thousand."

"Deposits?"

"$82,000, last statement."

"There are two banks I suppose. What are the deposits of the other bank?"

"Some more than ours—they——"

"How much more?" Simplex interrupted. "Have they $250,000?"

"Only $230,000," replied Ellison.

"I tell you what I'll do," proposed Simplex, "I'll begin at $25 a month if you will raise me one dollar a month for every $1,000 your deposits increase."

"You see," he hastened to figure, "a $1,000 deposit means $1,000 lent—that means eighty dollars a year interest—seven dollars and fifty cents a month. That is, for every dollar increase in salary I get, you get an increase of six dollars and fifty cents in interest. What do you say?"

He said nothing until he was hitching his horse in front of the Commercial Hotel.

"I reckon you are hired," Ellison said as Simplex jumped lightly out of the buggy. "The bank is that brick over yonder on the corner. Come around at one o'clock sharp. I got to have it out with Clelland first."

As Simplex bent over the cracked wash-bowl in the southwest room—the hottest in the house—of the Commercial Hotel, he gleefully spluttered the water as he slapped it on his face.

"Gee whiz!" he exclaimed, looking at himself in the glass as he wiped the dripping water from his tousled wavy hair. "A job in a bank! I knew when I got up this morning some good luck was in store for me!"

But he had not met Clelland.

II

SIMPLEX ate a hasty dinner and sat watching the clock in the office. At two minutes of one he went across the street to the corner building.

The Pioneer Bank was a small-town affair in which no money had been wasted for equipment. An iron railing with two windows for dealing with the public; a wall desk at one side with pens and ink and blank checks; a narrow passage back to the directors' room which was furnished with a plain table and plain stools.

R. C. Ellison, the president, was inside the railing, his elbow on the money counter, his stubbly chin held by thumb and fingers of the left hand. The tall lean cashier stood with an attentive left ear turned to him, but with a gloomy countenance facing the tray of silver at his right. He looked like a man who had been persuaded against his will and did not intend to forget it.

"Here he is now." Ellison straightened up and nodded to Simplex, indicating he was to come around through the narrow passage and enter the door into the precinct of the money-changers.

"Mr. Clelland, this is Mr. Cox, our new assistant cashier."

The cashier put out a clammy hand. He had cold reproving eyes with rather heavy, red lids, and almost colorless eyebrows. The top of his tall narrow head was so smooth and bald it looked like a hand-polished goose-egg.

"How do you do, sir," he said, formally letting Simplex's hand drop flabbily in the midst of the shake.

"Oh, I'm quite well. How are you?"

Simplex was really a little flustered. This human fish splashed most of his enthusiasm for the banking business right at the start. He knew he would not like Clelland. And evidently Clelland was not going to like Simplex, for he shook his head almost imperceptibly at Ellison.

"Mr. Cox and I have already had an understanding in regard to salary," said the president, who was principal owner and manager as well. "He is to start at $25 a month—counting from first to first—and is to be raised one dollar a month for every $1,000 he increases our deposits."

"For every thousand your deposits increase," corrected Simplex.

"Yes, that was it," assented the farmer.

Clelland's pallid tightly drawn upper lip curved at the corners, his eyes turned with a deliberate and contemptuous sneer upon Cox.

"A bank builder are you?" It was the tone he would have used on a fake mine promoter. "I suppose you will be willing to have your salary decreased one dollar for every thousand you decrease our deposits?"

"Sure," nodded Simplex brightly.

"Well—" Ellison gathered up some personal papers he wanted to take out home—"now that you fellows understand each other, I'll be going along. Got some second-crop clover to cut."

After Ellison left, Clelland stood looking

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out of the cashier's window in a sadly contemplative way. He held a fountain-pen upright and tapped the butt of it against the marble slab under his arm.

"Ever work in a bank?" he asked in a frosty, detached tone.

"No."

"Ever keep books?"

"Not much."

"Ever work in a commercial house of any sort?"

"Grocery store."

Clelland cleared his throat contemptuously and continued to look out of the window despondently as he tapped the marble with the butt of his pen.

Simplex was watching him. He thought he had found his vulnerable point.

"You see, Mr. Clelland," he said in a respectful tone, "I want to learn the banking business. That is why I am willing to begin on so small a salary. And I am so anxious to learn that I will be willing to do any and all parts of the work, early and late, that you explain and entrust to me."

"All right."

The bait had caught Clelland's attention. He turned about and took Cox to the desk where the heavy bank-books were spread and began to explain.

In a week Simplex was doing most of the clerical work, and had begun to wait on the window occasionally. There were two windows, one for the cashier and one for the assistant. When more than one customer appeared at a time, Simplex took his place at the second window and received deposits. He did not yet venture to cash checks, and of course had nothing to do with loans.

"In the banking business—" Clelland under the relief of the drudgery Simplex was shouldering warmed to give occasional lectures to his assistant—"one must be scrupulous, exact, impersonal and immovable."

"And inhuman?" naïvely added Cox.

The cashier nodded.

"All the better if you are. In a bank, a man has no business with feelings of any sort. He must never show them if he has."

ONE day Simplex began to notice that when two customers came in at once to deposit money, they both tried to get to his window, and when one got there first, the other readded his deposit slip or figured at the desk until the other was gone. Clelland noticed this too, and there was a baleful scorn in his yellowish eyes.

Monday afternoon of the second week, the cashier wanted to go down-town for a short time. It was a slack hour and the bank was empty.

"If any one comes in, tell them I'll be back directly," said Clelland.

Cox was busy with his books when he heard some one enter the bank. He turned to his window to meet the customer—and looked into the face of a girl that made him forget all the other girls he had ever seen. She had a dimple and the brightest, most innocent blue eyes, and a nose that would have been pert, if her mouth had not been so kind and sympathetic.

"Good afternoon," she said, nodding her white lacy Summer hat slightly, and laid before him a check.

Without ever seeming to look at it, he saw at one glance it was for $50 and was signed by some man named Hunter, the initials might have been R. M. or anything as they were run together in a way that some men think prevents forgery.

Without a question or an instant's hesitancy, Simplex counted out $50. That done, he looked at her with undisguised friendly admiration.

"You are Miss Hunter?" he asked, as she folded the bills.

"Yes."

"My name is Simplex Cox," he remarked.

"You have not been here long, Mr. Cox?"

"Not nearly as long as I hope to be," he smiled, and his brown eyes were good to look into. "Only nine days."

"You like Elm Springs then?"

"Very much. I have met so many nice people."

"In nine days?" There was a bit of incredulous banter in her tone.

"It does not take long to see the loveliest roses in the garden," he remarked. "No doubt I'll find the thorns later." There was the hint of wistfulness, of past shadows in the tone.

"That sounds funny for a banker," she laughed. "They usually do not deal in figures of speech."

"I believe in reciprocity," he said. "If our customers give me cash to use free, I will at least give them a pleasant word in exchange."

"That is a good idea," the girl said soberly. "I'm glad you are in the bank"—

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some one else was at the door— "Glad to have met you Mr. Cox. Good afternoon." She left a little precipitately.

It was Clelland. Inside the door he turned and watched her down the street. He took off his hat and ran a clammy hand over his stark, bald head.

Coming around behind the counter he stopped beside Simplex and looked down at the check which he still held in his hand.

"Did you cash that girl's check?" he asked in an awful still tone.

"Yes."

"Do you know that man?" he pointed a long forefinger at the signature.

"No."

"Did you know the girl?"

"No."

Simplex really began to squirm. What had he done? Was this, after all, one of those women adventurers who go about the country fleecing innocent bankers?

"And you cashed that check without asking for identification?" the cashier spoke in weary scorn.

"I did."

Clelland gave one long, weary contemptuous sigh and went to the telephone and called for Ellison.

III

SIMPLEX stood listening with goose-chills playing over him, as the cashier waited for the president to come to the phone.

"I am out again," Cox told himself with a sensation of dropping into a big slough of failure. "I wonder what fool thing I did do in cashing that paper"?

He still held the check in his hand looking at it absently. It was on the Farmers & Traders, the rival bank.

"Hello—Ellison?" Clelland had his connection, and the goose-chills crept faster and faster along Simplex's spine. "Say, Burdette can give Todd and Thomas as security. Shall I make the loan?"

Simplex felt as Atlas might when the law of attraction lifted the earth off his shoulders.

"Do you know"— Clelland stood at the young assistant's elbow and looked accusingly at the check—"that in cashing that you violated the two fundamental rules of banking, which are: you must know the person who presents a check, and know the check is good."

"I did." Simplex's confidence came back in a rush.

"I thought you said you had never met either Mr. Hunter or the girl who cashed that check?"

"But I was sure the check was good," said Simplex, "for I knew that girl would not present a bad check."

Clelland lifted his light, pallid upper lip into a sneer, made a clucking noise in his throat, and turned away in absolute disgust.

AS THE Autumn came the antipathy between the cashier and his assistant increased. The more so as customers continued to seek the window of the assistant cashier to do their business. The hate for Simplex showed in every tone and movement of the fishy Clelland—he hated his wavy hair, his bright open eyes, his exuberant spirits.

And, in turn, Simplex watched Clelland's methods as an example of what not to do. Clelland in receiving an application for a loan always stood very rigid and looked clear over the head of the applicant, listening in a sort of chill suspiciousness as the embarrassed borrower fumbled his tie and referred to the necessity of buying a little hay, or paying for a new automobile tire.

"Well, money is pretty tight," Clelland would invariably repeat, "but, if you can get two good men on your note, we'll try to accommodate you."

Even if the loan was only ten dollars he invariably asked for those two good men, and always made the borrower feel like a beggar.

Simplex followed exactly the opposite plan. He cultivated people both in the bank and on the streets. He made them feel it was a pleasure for the bank to do business with them. Always thanked the depositor when he handed him his deposit book, and had a pleasant word to say to the man who cashed a check.

One afternoon in October, when the day's balance was completed and the bank closed, the cashier asked his assistant to come back into the office.

"There are several things I want to call your attention to," Clelland said precisely and coldly. "You seem to forget a bank is not a vaudeville show. You are here to do business for the bank and not to entertain customers and idle visitors."

"Have I neglected my work?"

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The blood began to run pretty fast into Simplex's head. That tone stirred him almost to the danger-point. He had been doing two-thirds of all the work in the bank, and it looked as if he would do it all, if the cashier kept on shirking.

"You have done very well," grudgingly admitted Clelland. "But I'm advising you on general principles. People suspicion a banker who is too convivial. For instance, you have been seen a great deal with that Hunter girl."

Simplex was half out of his chair and his hand reaching for the fishy cashier's throat before he caught himself.

"Don't you mention Miss Hunter," he said, breathing angrily.

"I was not reflecting on her character. I guess she's——"

Simplex reached across the table and Clelland veered to one side.

"Sit down," advised the cashier. "What I started to say was, where a young fellow in the bank is much in the company of girls, takes part in the ordinary frivolities, people get suspicious and are afraid to trust the bank."

"Our deposits have increased $25,000 in three months," said Simplex.

"The time of year accounts for that," explained Clelland.

"What were your deposits this time last year?"

A bit of embarrassment showed under the cashier's whitish skin.

"Oh, this is a different season."

"But our rival's deposits," said Cox, "are twenty thousand lower."

Clelland waved a tired hand dismissing the subject.

"We won't discuss your inestimable value to the bank," he said sarcastically. "No one knows so much about that as you do yourself.

"And the suggestions I have offered were merely for your own good. Mr. Ellison has been noticing it, and does not approve at all."

On Thursday of the same week, R. M. Hunter came into the Pioneer Bank. Mr. Hunter had a plump jovial face, gray side-whiskers and a bald head. He was the most prosperous farmer and stock-raiser in the country, but had never done any business with the Pioneer Bank. Viola Hunter, the girl who had cashed the check, was not his daughter but his niece, and divided her time between his home and the home of her married sister in town.

"This is Mr. Cox?" Hunter extended his hand through the window. "Glad to meet you young man—been hearing a good deal about you." He winked at the cashier who was peering through his window fishily. "Been thinking it over and decided to do a little business with you boys."

The "little business" was a deposit of $10,000 which sent Simplex's salary up to $60 a month, and his spirits to the seventh heaven. Even Clelland was two-thirds decent to him all day. And when Ellison came to town the next morning and heard of it, he actually shook Simplex's hand.

"No better customer in the country. Been trying to get him for years."

On the first of November, Viola Hunter came in with a $50 check. Simplex noticed she had a $50 check each month from her uncle.

"I'm so glad uncle is doing part of his banking here," she said with the dimples deepening in her cheeks and her eyelashes drooping over the eyes. "You are making a wonderful banker, Mr. Cox. Everybody likes you so well."

Simplex felt good these days anyway and the praise from this dainty girl made him want to reach out of the window and grab her hand. She had been lovely to him and he felt that below all her vivacity and banter was a seriousness and loyalty that made her a real friend.

"Thank you, Miss Hunter. I owe a big part of my good luck to you." He had explained to her one evening the sliding scale of his salary. "I do believe I'm going to succeed, and I like the work very much."

"Father used to do business here—" shadows came into her eyes, her face dropped into lines of sadness which Simplex had never seen before—"but there was some trouble. So uncle never would have anything to do with this bank until you came."

"And you persuaded him," Simplex laughed, but his eyes looked into hers with meaning gratitude.

Simplex did not see Mr. Hunter very often. He came in two or three times during the Fall to deposit or borrow. But Clelland always made the loans. And Hunter was the one man to whom even Clelland never suggested "two good men on your note." Sometimes Hunter borrowed as much as $12,000 for a month or so; and

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then would deposit $20,000. He was buying and selling stock for and from his own farm all the time.

The work devolved more and more upon Simplex. Clelland found it easy to shirk and seemed tired of his job. He no longer resented his assistant's popularity, but used it instead as an opportunity to get out of work. Simplex was now even allowed occasionally to make loans to customers who were known to be good. Simplex guessed this was an order from Ellison as he was sure that Clelland would not have risked him on his own account.

The third of December, Clelland was out of the bank all morning on some other business. Just before noon Mr. Hunter came in. Evidently he had been loading stock as he wore old clothes and was considerably soiled.

"Want to borrow $4,000," he said hurriedly.

"All right, Mr. Hunter."

Simplex filled in the note and pushed it through the window. He signed and held it, looking at it casually as Simplex counted out $4,000 in hundred-dollar bills.

"Thank you, Mr. Cox." Hunter picked up the bills and pushed the note through the window and went out.

As Simplex started to put the note in the drawer he glanced at the signature, looked closely, stunned. Held the note up and gasped. It was signed—

"S. W. Hunter."

Simplex hurried to the telephone and called up a young lawyer he knew.

"Say, has R. M. Hunter a brother?"

"Yes."

"Look anything like him?"

"As much alike as two hen eggs. Twins. Is he back?"

Simplex felt the sweat oozing from the root of every upstanding hair.

"Is—is he good—for a small loan?"

"Not good for a peck of wheat bran."

IV

SIMPLEX suffered enough torture that afternoon to punish him for all the carelessness of two or three lifetimes. Why had he not looked at the signature before he counted out the money? Why hadn't he known that man was not R. M. Hunter, even if he did look exactly like him?

He did not mention the matter to Clelland when he came in. That ghoul would dig out the skeleton from his drawer soon enough. Only a few hours and Simplex would be out of a job and in disgrace.

But Clelland did not notice the note that afternoon—in fact, left all the balancing of the books to Simplex. And the next day and the next, the cashier said nothing.

Simplex went on from day to day as a man condemned to be shot, who did not yet know the hour of execution. He learned what he could about the other Hunter. He had once been prosperous, became financially involved, bankrupt, and left the country hopelessly in debt. He was the father of Viola Hunter, whose uncle R. M. Hunter had been taking care of her ever since the brother disappeared.

Ten days passed and still Clelland had not discovered the worthless four-thousand-dollar note, or if he had, he kept ominously silent about it.

One evening in making the day's balance Simplex found Clelland had deposited $2,000 to his personal account. The cashier was exceedingly saving and had accumulated considerable money which he usually kept loaned on private notes. No doubt this was a collection he had made. And yet, Simplex went through the deposit slips to see in what form the two thousand had been entered. The deposit slip read:

"Draft, $2,000."

That was a little interesting. He next ran through the out-of-town drafts and checks that had been canceled during the day and were ready to be mailed to the clearing-house. The draft to T. O. Clelland was from the St. Louis Trust Company.

The more he thought of it, the more interested Simplex became in that two thousand. He went to the express office.

"Jim," he asked offhand, "what day was it we expressed that currency to St. Louis?"

The express agent looked up his books.

"The twenty-sixth," he said. "St. Louis Trust Company, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

That night Simplex wrote the Trust Company.

GENTLEMEN:

I can not account for a discrepancy in my balance on October 26th of $100 unless in sending you what I thought was $2,000, I sent $2,100.

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Do you recall the shipment of currency from us on that date?

Sincerely,
SIMPLEX COX,
Ass't Cashier.

He enclosed a return-envelope addressed to him personally. As he always got the mail mornings, there was little danger of the reply falling into the hands of the cashier.

Two days later he got this:

We recall distinctly your shipment of currency. It was $2,000. Twenty one-hundred-dollar bills, for which a draft for $2,000 on New York Exchange was issued to your cashier as per instructions.

J. T. CROSBY,
Cashier.

Simplex sat on his stool that morning looking out of the bank window with a grim but relieved look.

He had paid S. W. Hunter $4,000 in one-hundred-dollar bills for that worthless note. He felt sure now it was a fixed-up job and that Clelland and Hunter had divided the spoils. The cashier would not only profitably kill two birds at one throw, but also kill off a despised assistant cashier as well.

Simplex was eager now for Clelland to discover the note. He was ready for him. But it was a distinct shock to know Viola Hunter had such a rascally father. Still lots of good people had rascally fathers.

For several days, Clelland was almost polite to his assistant. Had not called him to account for any alleged "unbankerly conduct" for a week.

Tuesday afternoon, just before closing, Viola Hunter came in.

She put a soft, warm and capable hand through the window and shook hands in a cordial way.

"Say, Mr. Cox, I'm going up to Bell Junction this evening to visit my cousin a week. County club gives a dance tomorrow night. Can't you come up?"

Simplex answered the smile in her eyes:

"Surely—I'll be there. I'll come up on the 6:30 tomorrow evening."

Clelland overheard; and when Miss Hunter left the bank, he turned and looked at Simplex long and hard. His eyes were so coldly fishy, suspicious and accusing that the young man felt the fighting blood burning his face and neck. But the cashier said nothing, and Simplex finished his work, whistling to show his indifference to the cashier's opinion.

Simplex had a delightful time at the dance. Miss Hunter, always good company, was in fine spirits. Her eyes, when they met his, filled with something more than admiration, for Simplex was good to look at. There was a hint of deeper feeling, of sympathy and of fellowship. She was very serious as they went to her cousin's after the dance.

"How are you getting along at the bank?" she asked a little solicitously.

"Fine! That is, all right, I guess," he answered. "Why?"

"I wondered——"

He saw she was troubled. Something was on her mind. Had she discovered her father's transactions, and transgressions?

"I—" she hesitated—"I've been afraid Mr. Clelland doesn't like you. Everybody else does. But that is reason why he would not. I wondered if he might not—try to make trouble for you."

"He might," admitted Simplex. "But he won't," confidently.

"I'm glad," she sighed with relief. This young man did seem competent.

They paused at the door, talking.

"Oh, say, will you do an errand for me? You go back on the 7:15 in the morning?"

"Yes," he answered both questions at once.

"Will you stop at Margaret's as you go to the bank in the morning and ask her to send up by parcel-post those garments of mine. She'll understand."

"Better still—I'll get them and send them up by parcel-post myself."

"Thank you, but you better have Margaret wrap them up for you," laughingly.

Next morning Simplex stopped at Viola's sister's on the way up from the depot to the bank and delivered the message.

Margaret had the garments already rolled up and handed him the parcel.

"I had intended to mail them today," she said, "but I'll be very much obliged if you do it. It will save me a trip to the office."

Simplex dropped the bundle in the grip with his own things and went on to the bank. It was nearly time to open and he was usually there a half-hour ahead to get things ready for the day's business. He set his grip down beside the safe and took up his usual morning routine.

It was a busy day. At noon Clelland said to him:

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"Cox, I want you to drive out to Dawkins's and see about that note that was due last week. I've got to go up to Bell Junction tonight to see those stock buyers about the loan they want; and before I can make it, we must know if Dawkins can pay up."

Simplex came back after banking hours, but found Clelland at his boarding-place and reported that Dawkins would pay in two or three days."

"All right," said Clelland. "We'll go ahead with the Davis loan. I'll see him tonight or tomorrow. If I don't get back in the morning you can manage all right, can't you?"

"Sure," said Cox.

Not until after supper did Simplex remember that his grip was still in the bank, and Viola Hunter's parcel still unmailed.

He went to the bank, opened the grip and took out the parcel. It was yet fifteen minutes until seven and if he hurried he could get the package in the mails before the post-office closed. In addressing it, the pen spilled and made a blur. He turned the parcel over to write on the other side. The string slipped off the end, and the wrapping came apart. He got a new piece of paper and started to rewrap it. The package fell apart.

It was lingerie, and as it unrolled . . .

He stopped and gasped. For a moment he stood and stared and he felt as though he was sinking through the floor.

Concealed in the lingerie were two large packages of bills!

V

SIMPLEX found it difficult to breathe. He stared at the bills and moistened his lips and swallowed. Then he collapsed on a stool to think. Usually he did not have to sit down to think, but his knees felt too weak to stand.

The first thought, black and repulsive, that swooped through his mind, was that Viola Hunter had been a party to the fake loan, and this was her share of the loot. But immediately Simplex drove that suspicion from him. She was honest and clean-hearted, through and through. Whatever this signified she was not a party to any treachery.

He got up and examined the bills. They were original packages of tens, $500 in all. They were new bills; part of a $20,000 shipment they had received that day from their St. Louis depository. Clelland had explained that they would need this currency if they made the big loan to Davis on his cattle.

Clelland had put these bills in this package!

But why? Simplex looked further into his grip. There was nothing more among his own clothes. But the side-pocket was slightly bulged. He unbuckled it.

There were twenty-five new twenty-dollar bills there.

Once more he sat down to think.

Clelland had done this, of course. He had noticed Simplex's grip that morning. Had made the excuse for sending him into the country. While he was gone had slipped these bills in this hiding-place. Plainly he had not meant for Simplex to discover them at once. Unrolling the parcel, he had discovered Viola Hunter's garments. Simplex's face burned red at the implications the fishy Clelland would make from them. The cashier had then slipped the bills into the parcel and retied it and had concealed the other bills in the side of his grip where he would not likely find them at once.

Why?

The explanation struck him so suddenly he leaped from the stool. His hands clenched. His face grew white. His teeth shut hard. Terror and hate swept over him. He must act, and act quickly.

The 6:45 train whistled out of the station. Clelland was on that train. It would stop at Bell Junction—would have to stop at least an hour. Perhaps he would not go farther.

The time-lock was on the safe. But Simplex quickly put the $1,000 in bills in the money-drawer by his window. He would risk it there, would have to. He took his grip, went out and locked the door.

Ten minutes later a car came out of Benson's garage with Simplex Cox at the wheel. It turned west in the direction of Bell Junction, and at the edge of town began to break state and county speed laws.

It was thirty-four miles to the Junction, and it took the local passenger train an hour and thirty-four minutes to make the run. It had fifteen minutes start, but on an easy stretch of level road, Simplex pushed the hand of the speedometer up to forty.

The road ran parallel with the railroad,

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and occasionally Simplex took his eyes from the lighted strip ahead, to glance down the railroad. After forty minutes he got a glimpse in the distance of the lights of the passenger train as it rounded a corner. It was still nearly five miles ahead.

Two long hills cut down his gain, and when he once more struck level road the train was out of sight again. He sped up until the light danced dizzily down the road, and the trees and fences passed him in a whirl. He was going fifty miles an hour.

Again he was in sight of the train, and perceptibly gaining. They would make a four-minute stop at Waller. On veering a half-mile north he missed the village entirely. When the train puffed out of Waller he was running abreast of it. He kept up his speed to the danger-point for he needed to beat it in.

He lost on a long hill, and at the top another car was standing and the driver signalled to him to stop. Instead, Simplex went by, jumping the ground like a crazy kangaroo.

The train had got a lead on him; the road turned in a jog for a mile, and more hills held him back so he never regained the loss.

When the train whistled into the Junction he was a half-mile out of town. He gave up reaching the depot in time to shadow Clelland, and headed for the Parton Hotel, four blocks uptown from the station. If Clelland were to stop at the Junction at all, he would go there.

Simplex parked his car in the shadow a half block down a side street and took up a position in a cigar store across from the hotel entrance. Directly Clelland came up the street, carrying his own bag, and entered the hotel.

Simplex crossed quickly and watched him register. Evidently he was going to stay all night, or pretend to, for the clerk called a bell-boy and sent him up to his room.

He came down almost immediately without his grip, and left the key at the desk and went out.

Cox shadowed him until he entered a café down the street and ordered his supper. Hurrying back to the hotel, Simplex entered with a leisurely, nonchalant air, bought a cigar, leaned comfortably on the desk and as he lighted the cigar glanced over the register until he found—

T. O. Clelland, Room 34.

Simplex got a paper, sat down and read and smoked until two or three traveling men approached the desk and engaged the clerk in conversation. Then he sauntered up and said briskly to the engaged clerk—

"34."

Without even looking at him, the clerk reached mechanically for the key, flung it on the desk and went on with his argument with the traveling men.

The entrance hall and the stairway were empty. Simplex went up two steps at a jump. Just how much time he had depended upon Clelland's appetite. It could not be many minutes at the longest.

Clelland's alligator bag was not in sight. Simplex searched the room, looked under the bed; then he thought of the closet. It was there, pushed far back in the darkest corner.

Simplex opened it with thumping heart, listening as he did for steps in the hall.

His guess was right. The grip was filled with packages of bills. There was no need to count. He knew here was the other $19,000 of that shipment of currency.

The cashier's diabolical plot was perfectly clear. He intended to conceal this, then have Simplex arrested on suspicion. And Viola Hunter! They planned to arrest her, too, just as that package reached her, and find part of the stolen bills among her underwear. They would search Simplex's grip and find five hundred more.

Of course that would be enough—more than enough. He was the thief—had stolen the rest, and concealed it. It meant a blackened character for Viola Hunter—ruin! He thought of that first, and the impulse to go straight to that restaurant and settle matters on the moment was almost uncontrollable.

But that would not do, not if the situation were to be saved. It meant twenty years in the penitentiary for Cox if Clelland's scheme worked.

Simplex glanced quickly around the room for wrapping-paper. There was not a scrap. He wanted to leave the grip in the closet with the appearance of being undisturbed. But manifestly he could not go out of the hotel with his arms full of bills.

There was no time to plan. He picked up the grip, walked out with it as coolly as possible—down the front stairs and out through the entrance hall. He did not have to pass through the office going out,

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and met only one man coming in and he took no notice.

Once upon the road in his car he began to think of possibilities. If Clelland came back and missed his bag at once, and suspected him, he would telephone ahead and have him stopped. Once caught with that $19,000 in his possession, no power on earth could save him from the penitentiary.

The farther he went the more nervous he got. Every light ahead and behind were danger signals to him. He was being pursued, or about to be stopped.

He had gone ten miles when he saw a car standing directly in the middle of the road two hundred yards ahead, and a man on either side of it.

VI

CLELLAND finished his supper without haste. He had calculated this thing for years and knew every move in advance. The one thing he felt sure that was of supreme importance was to appear absolutely unconcerned and at ease. All his movements must be casual.

He had been careful not to show any particular concern about his grip, had given it to the bell-boy as carelessly as any traveler with a bag of soiled linen. He had tarried only a moment in his room, had left the key at the desk—done the usual thing in the usual way. At least he thought he had. He tried to remember if there had been one mistake in his movements.

As he left the café he determined to be still more unconcerned. He went to a picture show.

It was ten o'clock when he returned to the hotel and asked for his key. The clerk reached for 34.

"You have it," he said, seeing the box empty.

Clelland felt a moment of doubt. He was sure he had turned the key in, but maybe in the tenseness of his effort to be casual he had merely thought he had. He felt in his pockets.

"I haven't got it," he said.

"Then you left it in the door," suggested the clerk and turned away to shake dice for the cigars with a hardware salesman.

Clelland could not but quicken his speed up the stairs. No one was in sight. He hurried down the hall to Room 34.

The key *was* in the lock! That was awfully careless. How could he have so blundered? He turned on the lights and made a quick step to the closet.

His bag was gone! He had been robbed!

Clelland sat down on the edge of the bed and tried to steady himself. As soon as he could think at all, he saw he did not dare report the theft. For then he would have to describe the contents of the lost bag. And how could a bank cashier explain having $19,000 of the bank's currency in his grip at nine o'clock at night?

No—the money was gone. It was a clear loss. All he could do was to save himself and his job in the way he had planned.

Clelland, after composing himself into his usual fishy coldness, called the police-station and asked for the officer with whom he had arranged.

The officer came to his room.

"Shadow the house where the girl is visiting," Clelland directed, "but don't make a move until I telephone. We want to catch the principal first. But watch the mail-man most carefully. If he delivers a package in the morning as I expect, seize it as evidence and keep the girl under observation. The probabilities are she is concealing the money for him."

Next, Clelland got Ellison on the long-distance. The farmer banker was mad for being aroused from sleep.

"Well, what is it?" he yelled as if suspecting the man at the other end of wanting to borrow money for a funeral.

"It is Clelland speaking," said the even, chilly voice of the cashier. "I think, Mr. Ellison, you'll be needed in town early in the morning. There have been some irregularities in your assistant cashier—I've been tracking him. Am at Bell Junction now. Cox does not suspect, so will not try to escape. Still, I'll have his boarding-house watched tonight. Have all the directors in the office in the morning when the bank opens. But say nothing to Cox. Don't let on you have any suspicion. I'll be home on the 8:30 and will come direct to the bank. I'll arrange by telephone to have an officer at the door of the bank.

"Serious? Well, rather—a figure that I imagine will startle you. Yes, we'll do all we can to recover the money, but not much hope, I fancy. Goodby."

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SIMPLEX was scared cold by the sight of the machine ahead but did not lose control of either himself or his car. Instead, he gave three piercing honks, turned far enough to the left to miss the other car, and, risking ditches, bumps, narrow roads and everything else, shot by at thirty miles an hour.

As the men made no signal for him to stop, nor attempted to pursue him, he guessed they were putting on a new tire.

After a half-hour, Simplex became more reassured and eased down his speed. The village was asleep as he entered the main street and turned in at the garage.

He took the grip and went directly to the bank. He was safe now, or at least would have a fighting show if found in the bank with all the money.

He slept part of the night on the floor of the bank, his head on that alligator bag, and a gun within easy reach. But it was a restless sleep, broken by dreams of robbers and sheriffs, the grasping Ellison and the fishy Clelland.

At daylight he was up, swept the bank, and did a little book work left over from the previous day.

The time-lock went off at eight, for sometimes country banks begin business at that hour. He opened the safe and put the currency back, both the $19,000, and the $1,000 taken from his grip and Viola Hunter's bundle.

Then he relocked the safe and went to the hotel for breakfast. He was back at eight-thirty and heard voices in the directors' room. There was nothing unusual about that, however, as the office had a door opening on the street, and Ellison carried a key, and often met men here to transact his private business.

At nine o'clock, Simplex opened the bank. A few moments later Clelland came up the street accompanied by the town marshal, who lounged with an uneasy show of indifference outside by the door.

The cashier passed with scarcely a glance at his assistant back to the directors' room.

In a moment one of them came out and said to Simplex with a jerk of his head—

"You are wanted back here."

Ellison sat at one end of the table, the directors on each side. Clelland stood. His face wore the cold, sneering look of contempt it had that first morning Simplex had entered the bank.

There was a moment's silence. Ellison fixed his small, gouging eyes on Simplex, as if he would give him the psychological third degree.

"Young man—" he paused to let the tone have its effect—"there ain't no use in beating around the bush. You are short in your accounts. We got an officer ready for you. What did you do with the money?"

"What money?" said Simplex blandly, without any show of suspicion or fear.

"The bank's money," snapped Ellison, "the twenty thousand you stole. Was you fool enough to think we wouldn't discover the shortage?"

"Have you taken anything, Mr. Ellison?" Simplex grinned good-humoredly. "Are you really drunk, or did you have a nightmare last night? There is no shortage. Our books balance exactly."

"Don't try to bluff," rasped Ellison. "Young man, you'll do one of two things. Either you tell us where you hid that money, and make good on it, or you'll go over the road for forty years."

The rest nodded. Clelland looked indifferently out of the window, as if bored by the delay in calling the officer.

"Gentlemen," said Simplex, "you are getting overheated without cause. I assure you the accounts of the bank are perfectly straight, for I balanced the books myself." He looked meaningly at Clelland, but the cashier stood with folded arms looking out of the window. "Come in and examine them for yourself."

Ellison got up and locked the outside door, first. Then they filed into the bank, Ellison just in front of Simplex and Clelland just behind him.

Cox opened the books.

"Here is our last night's balance. You see," he pointed to the item of 'cash in vault,' "we had at closing time last night, $43,948.76 cash on hand.

"There is the safe—" his tone suddenly took on a fighting edge—"count it! Have Clelland count it."

There was something in the way he said that which made the cashier glance at him from the corner of his eyes. And as Clelland moved to the safe, a slow paleness began to spread over the side of his face and neck.

When the door swung open and revealed the stacks of currency, Clelland's hands shook as he lifted them out.

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While he and Ellison counted, the directors looked on. Simplex leaned with folded arms against the ledge of his window. Directly when Clelland glanced at him, Cox made a slight movement of his hand toward the corner of the room. The cashier's eyes followed the gesture and rested on the alligator bag he had lost the night before.

The cash was found to be correct to a penny.

Clelland was now white enough for a ghost, and from time to time he ran his tongue over his lips.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must apologize for a serious error. I want to beg Mr. Cox's pardon for falsely accusing him. The mistake happened like this: Yesterday we got this currency on the noon train to take care of a big stock loan. While Mr. Cox was out, I ran over the books as I do every day, and as this $20,000 in currency had not yet been entered on our books, it showed a discrepancy of $20,000. So I instantly concluded our assistant cashier was short that amount."

It was a thin explanation, but none of the directors were bookkeepers and they were so relieved to find the money in the vaults that they accepted it readily.

All of them shook hands with Simplex and apologized for their mistake and left—all but Ellison.

"I want to see you back here." He nodded to the directors' room again.

"Sit down," Ellison ordered.

"I prefer to stand." Cox's tone was no longer bland.

"I'm glad," said Ellison scratching his stubbly chin, "you wasn't short. But just the same, there's a few things I got to say to you. You are running around entirely too much. Going with girls and to dances and the like. It ain't good for the reputation of the bank. A fellow's got to have a mighty good character to stay in a bank."

"Mr. Ellison—" Simplex's eyes began to give out a little of the wrath they had been suppressing—"there has been plenty of reflection on my character already this morning. I don't care for any more."

"Oh, of course," said Ellison, remembering the business this young man had brought. "I ain't saying anything's wrong with your character——"

"Better not," warned Cox.

"But what I started to say," went on Ellison, "is, that our agreement about wages is all off. You are now drawin' $80 a month and you ain't worth that. We can get plenty of bookkeepers at $40 or less. So, hereafter, that will be your wages. And I want to see you sticking strictly to business—and not running around just for the fun of it."

All day, Simplex and Clelland worked side by side with not a word of reference to what had happened. Two or three times when Cox remembered the plan of the cashier to blacken the good name of Viola Hunter and send him to the penitentiary, he felt his fingers struggling to get hold of Clelland's throat. But he restrained himself and went on with the day's work.

At half-past eleven, a telephone call came for Simplex. It was Miss Hunter.

"I came home at eleven," she said agitatedly. "I want you to come to Margeret's for dinner."

Viola was watching for him, and opened the door as he stepped on the porch.

"I've been worried sick," she began the moment he entered the room. "I just learned last night about the loan to father. You see it was a trick of Clelland's to get you in trouble. I saw it at once. Papa trusted Clelland in a deal ten years ago, and lost everything. Clelland claimed papa owed him $2,000 on it. But I've always believed he really got away with papa's money. So when papa returned, he jumped on him for that $2,000 and of course he did not have it. Clelland told him to go to the bank at noon and borrow $4,000 of you, and pay him $2,000 and keep the other $2,000 to get a start on."

Viola was crying.

"I'm so sorry. You've been so kind. I wouldn't have had this happen for anything in the world! And I have the $2,000 here that father got; but I don't know how he'll ever pay the other $2,000. And that will lose you your job."

Simplex put out his hand and covered hers—took the soft, warm hand in both of his. Held it tight and patted it.

"Don't you worry about my job, little girl. Just tell your father to use that $2,000 in getting a new start, and lose no sleep over the other $2,000. Clelland certainly did steal his money. I'm sure of it, but he's had a sudden change of heart and will make it good."

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ALL that afternoon, Clelland watched Simplex uneasily, sometimes glancing furtively out of the corner of his eyes at the young man whistling and humming at his work; sometimes he turned squarely and studied Cox when his back was turned.

Toward closing time, the cashier grew more restless and uneasy. His hand shook so he could scarcely make the final entries. For one thing he had been working hard all afternoon, not asking Simplex to do more than his share.

Finally the outside door was closed, the day's balance ready to be made.

Clelland felt the hour had come for some sort of an understanding. He turned to Simplex, but avoided the boy's eyes, as his clammy lips said—

"Well?"

Cox stood looking at him without reply, until Clelland forced himself to meet the eyes of his assistant. There was a look of contempt, of leashed hate, that gave him a sudden physical fear as well as mental terror.

"Well?" he repeated and tried to grin.

"There are a few things to do," said Simplex and the tone left not a glimmer of doubt but they would be done.

"What?" asked Clelland weakly.

"First, write your personal check for $4,000 in payment of that note of S. W. Hunter's."

Clelland did it.

Simplex stamped the check "paid," put it in the file with the other paid checks, tore up Hunter's note, and made entry of the collection on the books.

"Now," he said, turning to Clelland with a degree more emphasis, "write a receipt for all claims against S. W. Hunter and sign it."

There was no protest. Somehow Clelland felt arguments would be dangerous just now.

"Ordinarily," said Simplex, "an officer in a bank holds his position on good behavior until the annual stockholders' meeting. That will be about four months from now. I am drawing $80 a month. I'm entitled to four months pay. Write me a check for $320 on behalf of the bank and square it with Ellison any way you please."

This, too, was done, and Clelland ventured as he handed it over—

"Are you going to quit?"

"Going to quit?" for a moment the blood flowed into Simplex's face and he felt his self-control slipping. "Going to quit? Do you think I'm going to stay here and sit up nights to see that I'm not sent to the penitentiary for another man's thefts?

"Now," said Simplex, "get the State bank examiner on the long-distance phone and ask him to be here early in the morning. I'm going to stay right in this bank until I'm checked out with a clear official record."

Clelland did that with some reluctance. For it meant that $4,000 check of his had to go through. There could be no doctoring of the books on that.

"Well?" repeated Clelland, moistening his lips as he waited further orders.

"If you are going to leave," he ventured again when there was no immediate reply, "do you expect me to resign too?"

Simplex's eyes were looking through the window, out on the Winter road. Tomorrow, when the bank-examiner checked him out, he would go forth, once more seeking a job, once more looking for a life-work. And he would have to leave behind a girl with dear blue eyes—and a dimple—and a sympathetic smile.

It was tough to go when prospects had been so bright. But, of course, to remain was impossible. Already he had twice escaped, almost by accident, being sent to prison for other men's crimes. Yes, he would go in the morning, sure.

"Shall you resign?" he became conscious of the guilty cashier's anxious question.

If he stays, Simplex said to himself, sooner or later he is sure to go to the penitentiary, where he belongs. They are always caught.

"How much is old Ellison worth?" he asked.

"About $300,000," replied Clelland, wondering what that had to do with it.

Then, mused Simplex to himself, no matter what happens to the bank, the depositors will not lose. Ellison would have to make up the shortage.

"No," he turned suddenly to Clelland, "you don't need to resign. I think I'd rather you would hold your job. Get out now until the examiner comes."

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Malena

A Three-Part Story
-Conclusion-

by Farnham Bishop & Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Authors of "In the Grip of the Minotaur."

CHAPTER XII

ROBBED

MALENA awoke to the insistent music of singing birds, and for a few minutes lay relaxed in luxurious half-slumber. It was hard to stir her tired, cramped limbs. At last she raised herself, rubbed her eyes, and smoothed out the wrinkles in her now sorely crumpled uniform. Her first thought of her wounded lover, she bent over him with tender solicitude and passed her hand softly over his still hot and throbbing forehead.

"*Pobre niño,*" she murmured, "*pobre niño mio!*"

"*A su servicio, señor capitán.*" The stolid face of Pedro thrust itself into the open window of the coach, blotting out the bright daylight. "It is time for the captain's breakfast. I have some fine frijoles on the fire, the coffee is hot, and there are tortillas."

"It is well," Malena assured him. "We will eat at once. But the *señor coronel* is too sick for such food. What have you for him?"

"A stray chicken was sent by the good God to my very hands this morning," Pedro replied. "There is excellent broth."

"We will thank the good God, and you too. But first, since the air in the coach is none too good, help me to take the colonel out into the air. Lift him carefully, as you love your skin."

Thus admonished, Pedro opened the coach door, picked up the strengthless body of Culver with the utmost care, and carried him into the shade of the trees to one side of the road, where a fire snapped crisply. The *mozo* served breakfast with deftness and great dignity, proud to wait upon officers of such distinction. Before satisfying her own hunger, Malena fed the warm broth to her helpless charge, guiding each mouthful to his lips.

The meal once over Pedro communicated a piece of disturbing news.

"We can go no farther for the present, *señor capitán,*" he informed Malena, "for the mules have each cast a shoe to the devil and require to be reshod."

"How far is it to the nearest blacksmith?" Malena questioned.

"About three leagues back," Pedro replied.

"Then take the beasts there and have them shod. Make haste, for we do not want our good mules seized by the first band of armed stragglers."

"We have left all such far behind, my captain. We are as alone as we were born."

"So much the safer, then," Malena answered with unconcealed relief. "Now be off with you, and return swiftly."

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"*Si, señor.*"

Untethering the mules, he mounted one and rode off, leading the other, their heels kicking up a cloud of dust.

Malena considered a while, watching the sun filtering down through the leaves into Culver's eyes.

"It won't do," she murmured to herself; and, raising his shoulders, she half-dragged the invalid further into the trees, until he was completely screened by their foliage from the sun overhead and the dust of the road.

She looked about her, ears and eyes alert. So far as she could see, they were entirely alone. On each side of the road, the overarching trees which hid them seemed those of a land unsettled by men; and the fragrant woods were astir with unfrightened small wild things. To the right, she could hear the pleasant plashing of a brook, which the forest concealed from her sight. In the growing heat, its water seemed to call an invitation to her hot, dusty limbs.

She went back to the coach, taking care to notice that it was as well hidden from Culver's sight, should he rouse, as he was from hers. Once more she glanced cautiously up and down the road, then entered the coach, stripped off her uniform and the clothes beneath, and, clad only in her thick black hair, dashed swiftly into the wood. A few steps took her to the stream, whose waters, a short distance from where she stood, formed a crystal pool.

Daintily she thrust in one foot, then the other. Oh, but its coolness was grateful to her hot skin! She stepped in up to her knees, at first glancing about stealthily ever and again, to make sure that she could not be seen by any passers-by. At length, however, as no one passed, her watchfulness relaxed, and she gave herself over utterly to the joy of the cool, clear water.

WELL refreshed at last, she drew out the comb that had held her hair flat to her head, and shook out her long curls. Again and again she passed the tortoise-shell through the tangled mass, till the dark cloud of hair rippled over her snowy shoulders in glistening threads of jet.

Suddenly her hand stopped in midstroke; she stood rigid, alert, like a startled nymph. Down the road came the unmistakable tread of men and horses!

Leaping from the pool, Malena plunged into the depths of the nearest thicket. She crouched there, shivering, listening in a panic of apprehension as the party approached. Not only did she fear for herself, wholly unprotected as she was; but the thought of Culver lying helpless and imperiled unnerved her. He was safe for the time being, hidden as he was by the trees; but the newcomers, who might be soldiers, or bandits, or both, would find the coach and possibly surmise his presence from it.

"But they are gone, José!" It was the voice of Pedro; but why had he returned so soon, and with strangers?

"So much the better, *hermano.* We can just make off with this pretty carriage before they return, and who will know that we have taken it? *Madre de Dios!* What is this? The uniform of your fine captain, or I'll eat my cigaret. Buttons of real silver! By the bones of the Virgin, this is a good haul!"

This in a rough, surly voice that sounded as if its owner would have small compunction in stabbing a wounded soldier, or attacking an unprotected woman.

"But this is Captain Hidalgo's property!" she heard Pedro protesting. "I know not how he came to part company with it, but when he returns he will be most grieved not to find it."

"He would be more grieved if we stayed to cut his throat," retorted the voice of Jose. "But, toe-nails of the Savior! He may have taken a pistol with him, who knows? We'll just take what's here and be off. As for you, Pedro, your father was my godfather, or I'd call our bargain off here and now, and put a stop to your whining with my knife."

"Let the lad be," a third voice broke in. "The truer to his master, the truer he'll be to us. Pedro, my boy, leave your conscience to the care of the saints and be a good fellow. When you woke up this morning, you were another man's servant, with nothing but your ragged clothes to call your own. Now you're one of us, with a third part in two good mules, a fine coach, and a silver-trimmed uniform of prime cloth. Before this war is over, we'll have picked up enough to set us up for life."

"As you say, my brothers," Pedro answered uneasily. "But Black José frightens me with his talk of throat-cutting. These officers have treated me well, *compadre,*

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and I don't want their blood on my hands. When you proposed to me that we rob them, I was willing enough, since otherwise you would have killed me; but I don't want to see them hurt."

"Oh, have your own way!" growled José. "But let's be off with the plunder before they return. See here, lads! It would be a merry jest to take this fine carriage by the shafts and make off with it quietly, one of us leading the mules ahead, and get away with the whole thing. When they return, all is gone. They look about, scratch their heads: 'Maria! Where is our coach? Where are our clothes? We must hoof it along on the feet God gave us!' Eh?"

The joke was received with appreciative chuckles; and after a moment Malena heard the wheels of the coach roll down the road, the dry grating of the tires punctuated by the sound of feet and the plunk-plink of the hoofs of the still unshod mules.

When the thieves had receded into the distance, Malena crept out of the thicket and came as close to the road as she dared. She was furious at Pedro's treachery and her own helplessness, and almost sick with apprehension. What could she do now? Alone with a half-dead man, without conveyance, arms, or even clothes to cover her, how could she hope even to reach the shelter of the nearest village? And once there, if she could get there at all, what protection could she find against the lawless characters with which the countryside abounded?

She stood behind a thick-stemmed tree, ready to run deeper into the woods if any one approached. Away from the warm sun, she was almost blue with cold.

As she lurked there, ears strained for the slightest sound, she heard the thin voice of a woman uplifted in quavering song. Nearer and nearer it came, till Malena could distinguish the words of a hymn to the Virgin. Here might be rescue, she thought to herself, and she crept out from behind her shelter, ran to the very edge of the wooded road and dodged again behind a sturdy live-oak. Now, by peering cautiously around its trunk, she could see who passed.

Slow, plodding footsteps came closer toward her hiding-place. It was indeed a a woman, she discovered, an old woman, obviously an Indian, clad in a loose, faded blue dress girdled in at the waist, her white hair wrapped in a bright-colored strip of cloth.

"*Madre!*" called the distressed girl. "*Madrecita mia!*"

The old woman stopped in her tracks with a gasp of surprise and looked uncertainly about.

"Little mother!" Malena cried again, stepping half out from behind the oak. "I am in such trouble!" Tell me, if you can, where I can find some clothes. My own have been stolen while I bathed."

"Pitiful Virgin!" the old woman ejaculated. "But it is a girl, and naked as a needle! Of a certainty, my child, I will find you some clothes; but it will take time. Do you remain here while I go back to the village. It is but a step, and no one will run off with you if you keep out of sight. The saints keep you, my daughter!"

She turned about and disappeared in the direction from which she came, hurrying as fast as her feeble old legs would carry her. For three-quarters of an hour Malena waited, beating off the mosquitoes that attacked her in swarms, and listening intently for any sound upon the road. At last she heard the old woman's voice uplifted in exhortation.

"Not a step more do you go, Juan. The girl has not a stitch to her back, I tell you! Wait there till I call you."

Juan evidently did as he was told, for the old woman came on alone and stopped by the live-oak.

"Here I am, child!" she called, "with enough to clothe you like a lady."

Malena thrust out one white arm from behind the tree, received the garment which her deliverer held out to her, and stepped back deeper into the wood. In a moment more she emerged on the road, clad like any peasant-woman in a loose, one-piece cotton dress. Her small white feet were naked, her arms were bare to the elbows, and her hair was twisted into a knot at the base of her rounded neck.

"Mother, I thank you from my heart," she began; but the old woman interrupted her with a shrill cry.

"Juan, my man! Come here!" she called. "It is an angel, no less, or at the very least, a lady."

Juan approached, a man of about fifty-five, bent and wrinkled prematurely with toil. His mouth boasted not a tooth, and his white hair framed a kindly face deep-lined and sad. He stopped and stared silently for a little, then said gently:

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"*Mi mujer*, the lady will be in need of rest, for she is a stranger here, and therefore comes from far off. Bid her welcome to our house."

Malena forestalled the invitation.

"If I may tax your kindness still further," she asked, "there is a wounded officer with me who needs rest and shelter more than I. Can you help me take him to your village?"

"*Seguramente*," the old man assured her. "But I do not see him."

Malena led them to the spot where Culver lay; and the old Indian, with a degree of strength which no one would have expected of one of his few inches and many years, picked up the delirious soldier and lifted him to his shoulders. To Malena's protests he replied simply:

"I am used to burdens, señorita, I am a *cargador*."

He advanced steadily and at a good pace with his burden, leading the way down the road. After a few minutes' walk the road forked, one branch being little more than a mule-track winding up a hill. Ten minutes more brought them to its brow, just over which a little village nestled amid its fields, at the foot of a lofty range of tumbled mountains across the valley. The old man pointed to the nearest cluster of huts and said proudly—

"This is our home, señorita."

"What village is this?" Malena asked.

"It is called Dolores," the Indian answered.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SOUL OF MEXICO

JUAN'S dwelling, a one-room adobe hut, was put at the señorita's disposal, with true native courtesy. The old *cargador* lowered his burden gently onto a tattered blanket of home weave and folded and thrust a second under the wounded man's head.

"He will do well enough for the present," Juan assured Malena. "Maria, *mi alma*, prepare something for our guests to eat, for it is past noon."

The Indian woman left the hut and busied herself about a stone oven in the yard, from which there presently arose the smells of cooking.

"You have been very good to us," Malena addressed the old man, "but I can not permit our presence to inconvenience you for any length of time. There must be a bit of land and a roof for us somewhere in the village. Tell me the name of the *jefe politico*, and I will make inquiries of him."

"The *jefe* is with the army," Juan replied, "and the civil administration is in the hands of our priest, Padre Ramón. But the señorita is welcome to all our house contains, for as long as she desires to stay."

Maria bustled in with an earthen dish of warmed-over frijoles and tortillas. Culver, whose fever was rising again, had no use for food, which was well, as there was nothing he could safely have eaten. After the meal, Malena thanked her hosts again.

"And now," she said, "if I may leave the sick señor with you for a while, I go to find Padre Ramón." Juan rose gravely, his battered sombrero in his hand, and led the way.

From one little cluster of huts to another they passed, through green fields and well-kept vineyards, toward a little church of yellow stucco whose red tiles rose high above the thatched roofs of the village. As they approached, Juan pointed out a small square house beside the church, built of the same material.

"There lives the Padre Ramón," he informed the girl. "He is a good man—a veritable saint. Much good has he done us in time of sickness, and in times of health he has taught us what crops grow best and how to care for them. His advice is good for the stomach and good for the soul."

The door of the house opened, and a tall, spare man appeared, tonsured, and clad in a long, coarse robe, girt in at the waist. He stood as if already informed of their coming, a look of calm, kindly beatitude on his ascetic face. Malena advanced to the threshold, kneeled down and kissed the hem of his robe. The Padre blessed her—with the episcopal blessing, Malena noted in astonishment— and held out his hand for Juan to kiss. The Indian paid his reverence and turned away silently.

"Come in, my daughter," Padre Ramón urged Malena. "I can see that you, a stranger here, have much need of help and comfort; else you would not have come to me. Not often, I am sure, has a village priest been your spiritual adviser."

Malena, who had intended merely to transact the necessary business incident to obtaining a house and garden for herself and Culver, felt herself unaccountably

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moved to tell this unknown servant of Christ all of her troubles. There was something about him which suggested to her overwrought mind, faintly but insistently, the face of Guido's Jesus. She followed him into the house, and, at his repeated suggestion, seated herself on a roughly made chair, evidently the priest's own handiwork.

Padre Ramón gazed at her with eyes that seemed to hold in their impenetrable depths something of the eternal tenderness of Mother Church herself. He did not urge her, but something in that gaze called to her heart and drew forth all her story in spite of herself.

The priest listened with silent attention, nodding quietly to himself the while, until Malena told of her participation in the battle of Buena Vista. Then a change passed rapidly over his face; the fine, sorrowful eyes grew fierce and stern; the gentle lines of his face stiffened and set. As she spoke, and the events of the battle poured from her lips, he paced up and down the room in nervous exaltation. The fire died down as she continued, however; and during her account of the terrible retreat, his eyes saddened and filled with tears. At length she finished, and he spoke.

"My daughter, it is the providence of God, and not chance, that has brought you to me. You are the daughter of my old friend and comrade, General Miranda, than whom no truer patriot ever breathed in Mexico. We two went out with Hidalgo, he and I; and now you, his daughter, have done great things for Mexico and liberty under the name of Hidalgo. Confess it was not chance that prompted you to take that name."

"Indeed not, Father," the girl replied. "Never, in the days of our exile, was I permitted to forget that I was the child of a patriot, that my father had lent his arm to the cause of freedom side by side with that glorious warrior-priest who, in this very village, first raised the banner of revolt aginst the tyranny of Spain. I felt that no other name could be so apt for one to assume whose heart beat only for Mexico. But now Mexico has fallen upon evil days, and my heart, which should have been hers alone, has been given to a stranger and an enemy."

"The ways of God are past our finding out, my child," the priest observed. "Do not censure your heart for what it could not help. You made the utmost sacrifice on the altar of your country when you used your love and your lover for Mexico's sake. Never, so far as I can make out from your story, have you committed any sin, for love's sake, against the cause."

"But it has been of so little avail, Father. The report that might have saved the battle was undelivered; I even failed to procure the withdrawal of the American army to Monterey. Only the jewels, of all I hoped to give, found their way to our President. Pray God they may help our bleeding contry!"

"I am far from sharing your confidence in General Santa Anna," replied Padre Ramón, "but I will not try to shake your faith in him. After all, in him lies our only hope. Oh, if there were in all Mexico but one man both strong and unselfish, with the crusading zeal, the love of liberty and honor, of brave Hidalgo! Were there such a man, able, devoted, and pure of heart, we should have to fear neither civil strife and greed within, nor invasion from without. But alas! In our country all is covetousness, ambition, pride, and pitiful weakness. Cortez the Conqueror brought these vices with him from Spain, and implanted them, however mixed with valor, on our soil.

"My daughter, go out into our little village here—Dolores, the village which bore Hidalgo and is so well fitted to be your refuge—go among our faithful, toiling, humble peons, work with them, play with them, worship with them; and you will find here the true Mexico. They are the soul of our country, pure by God's creation; debauched and led astray by their leaders, who are to them as the head of a man is to his soul. Yes, from Cortez to Santa Anna, every man who has risen to command has had at heart only the exploitation of this poor, bleeding soul of Mexico! Only from among the people themselves do true patriots arise; and they are all too soon overwhelmed by the forces of selfishness and hate! Yet God watches over this land; and the time will come when He will raise up the soul of Mexico. In the fulness of His good time our penance will be performed, and our everlasting glory be at hand!"

The old priest spoke with the fervor of an inspired prophet, and the thrill of his words was not lost on Malena. Her eyes flashed and she was about to speak, when

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the Padre's mood changed. He laid his hand gently on her head and said in a tenderer voice:

"It is such devotion as yours, my child, which makes me so hopeful. Courage and sacrifice are not unknown among us; and while they exist, Mexico's soul is sound. But this is not what you came for. This man you have with you, this well-loved enemy, what do you propose to do with him? For you tell me that he is unable to care for himself."

"I hoped, my Father," Malena answered, "that you might find for me some unused hut, some little patch of ground which could support us until he is well again. I do not know what will happen then; but for the present he needs me, having no one else to care for him. If I abandon him he will die—and I love him."

As she looked up at the priest, great tears stood in her eyes.

"That can easily be arranged," Padre Ramón assured her. "Our little community has not remained untouched by the war, and there are land and houses—such as they are—which no longer shelter those who labored in them. Enrico Tormes died at Palo Alto, and his wife and daughter were carried off by bandits. Their hut is at the foot of the mountain north of the church. It is rather remote from the others, but, if you do not fear to stay there, it will serve. There is hardly any danger now, since the army went north and will doubtless march back again without passing through Dolores, and there is little here to tempt thieves or stragglers.

"Here, moreover, you need not fear people's tongues. No breath of slander will disturb you, for my people are a gentle, childlike folk. As for what we shall do with your Captain Culver when he recovers—he can doubtless be exchanged. Exiled as I am, there are still those in Mexico City who remember me and who will use their influence at my request."

Malena looked up at him with a little awe in her eyes.

"Who are you, my Father?" she asked.

"A poor servant of Christ, my daughter. Forty years ago, before love of country fired me to follow Hidalgo, I was the rich and worldly young Bishop of Queretaro. It was I who performed your father's marriage-service, and would to God I might do the like for you. But you, even as I, have given all to our country, and only its service remains for us."

He extended his hand, and, stooping to kiss it, Malena saw that he still wore the episcopal ring. The sight of the jewel recalled to her mind a forgotten part of the business she had come to transact. Stripping the rings from her own fingers, she held them out to the priest.

"My Father," she asked, "let me implore you to take these rings for me. They are all that I have left. I fear that I am not strong enough to labor successfully in the fields, and I should find it hard work to care for two. If you can sell my rings, they should bring enough to support us both until he is well. Should there be anything left over, let it be spent for the poor and the sick."

Padre Ramón received the jewels, smiling a little to himself.

"It shall be done, my daughter," he assured her. "And it may be that the good God will find a way to care for you without their loss. If it should be so, I will return them to you. Now I must be about my Master's business. My servant will take you to your new home and will see that your captain is brought there in safety. The blessing of God go with you."

Pancho, the sturdy young Indian with whose help Padre Ramón performed all the arduous duties of church and parish, went back with Malena to the dobe dwelling of old Juan, and got Culver placed on an improvised litter of poles and blankets. Taking one end himself, Pancho assigned Juan the other, and the two men started off toward the mountain at a swift walk.

Both, realizing the need for care in transporting the invalid, took the greatest pains to avoid stones and obstructions in the path, and managed the litter with the utmost deftness. Malena followed, her eyes resting always on the backs of the men who carried her helpless lover.

Her new habitation was poor enough, four dobe walls and a thatched roof, two decrepit chairs, a wooden stool or two and a low, peg-legged table. She stood in the center, looking about in bewilderment, wondering how she should ever care for her invalid and herself without beds, cooking-utensils, or blankets.

Pancho picked at her sleeve.

"Señorita," he addressed her, "the Padre will send me with that which is needful as

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soon as it can be procured. He bade me tell you that you shall want for nothing."

Malena turned to thank him, but he was gone.

PADRE RAMÓN was as good as his word. All that she needed was furnished; moreover, the good Father, who had some knowledge of medicine, greatly aided Culver's physical recovery.

As week after week went by, the wounded man slowly and steadily recovered his strength; but the blow on his head seemed to have overthrown his reason. Not one articulate word could he speak. He seemed barely able to understand what was said to him, and he babbled and played about like a little child. Always, however, he followed Malena as a faithful dog follows its master. From the time when he was first able to get about again, he could hardly be persuaded to leave her for a moment. His eyes rested continually on her with a kind of dumb worship, as if the reason and the love of a man had been replaced by the instinctive devotion of a dog.

Gradually he regained all his strength again; and, as if in compensation for the loss of his intelligence, his muscular power became greater than it had ever been before. Now that he was able to help her cultivate their little patch of ground, Malena, grateful for the priest's kindness, resolved that she would use no more of the money realized from the sale of her rings than was necessary, leaving the rest for the good Padre's charities. In consequence, she tilled the ground with Culver's help; and, having always loved flowers, she gathered them from the wayside and the woods and transplanted them to make borders for her garden.

The country-folk were friendly and very kind. Often, returning from work, Malena would find some small gift laid just inside her door—a handful of fruit, a loaf of coarse corn-bread, or a dainty bit of gay feather-work.

No one molested them. That great man with the eyes of a child, who followed ever at Malena's heels, had shown his strength so often and so convincingly in the course of his daily toil that all respected him. "*El niño fuerte*," they called him: "the strong-armed child."

The new life was both sweet and bitter to Malena. It was a joy to her to have her beloved always near, and a source of strange, half-realized happiness to care for him; but the sight of his poor, vacant face, and the thought of his tragic childishness, gnawed at her heart. She gave herself over to serving him with all the devotion of her deep, true nature. She found a sad, half-maternal pleasure in the worship in his eyes. The underlying emotion in her heart was now an overwhelming tenderness toward this man who depended so entirely on her, for this great child who loved her so innocently.

One day she left Culver sleeping in the shade of the hut and went down to the brook to wash some clothes. The sun, as it shone through the leaves above her, made flecks and shadows that danced on the surface of the stream and disappeared when she thrust the clothes down into the water, soaping, kneading and pounding the dirt out of them. A strange peace was in her heart.

A heavy hand fell upon her shoulder. She turned abruptly, with a startled cry. An unfamiliar face, brutal and debased, glared at her bestially from under matted hair. Behind the man stood another, scarcely less evil in appearance. These were not of the village, for she had never seen them before.

But they were well-known to the village. Bad Antonio and Jesús the Killer they were called, wastrels and degenerates, who had lived in the nearest town and terrorized the peaceful valley until they had gone to the war. Now they had returned, and by ill-luck had seen Malena from the road. Men of unusual size and strength, thieves by nature and bullies by profession, they were feared as far as their names were known.

Their purpose was all too plain. With a cry of fear, Malena struck at the man who held her, lashing him across the face with a wet garment. The clinging cloth enveloped Bad Antonio's eyes like a bandage, and in his surprise he let go of her.

She took to her heels, only to be pulled down from behind by Jesús. She turned on him, writhing to get away, striking furiously and blindly, while he laughed at her helplessness.

A roar of inarticulate rage, the swift thudding of feet, a shock, and a cry of agony. Jesús the Killer spun about and fell to the ground, his nose flattened to his cheeks and his jaw shattered by a terrible blow.

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Malena picked herself up to see Culver, his face distorted in a fit of frenzied weeping, throw himself upon Bad Antonio. The bully went down headlong, Culver on top of him.

There came the snap of a broken bone, and Antonio's right arm went limp. Blow after blow Culver planted in the prostrate man's face, babbling the while like an infant. At last he got his fingers about Antonio's throat, and his victim's face became purple.

Malena seized Culver's arm.

"Let him go!" she cried. "Stop, in Heaven's name! Don't you see that you are killing him?"

She wrenched at the iron muscles of his fore-arm, striving to pull him loose; and all the while Antonio lay choking, nearer and nearer to death. At last Culver's dim brain took in the sound of her voice. He turned and understood that she wanted him to let the man up.

He smiled at her like an obliging child, let go his hold and rose. Antonio's puffed features regained their normal color, his lungs labored to take in the air again. Jesús was slowly rising to his feet, the blood coursing down his cheeks.

"Come," said Malena. "We must go back home."

CHAPTER XIV

KIDNAPED

DURING the weeks that followed the incident at the brook, Culver continued to thrive in physical health; but his mind remained infantile. The days succeeded one another, peacefully inactive and lazy.

The war seemed, for the time being, as remote as the deeds of a dead age. But suddenly, like a thunder-storm on the brooding desert, it thrust its violent hand into the quiet of their lives.

One hot, indolent afternoon in early Summer, a lean, saturnine Mexican in the tattered remains of a uniform came down from the hills, hungry and footsore. Making his way to the nearest house, which happened to be Malena's, he entered without invitation and, with the peremptory impatience of the half-starved, demanded food. Culver, his clouded brain sensing something about the stranger to which he took an instinctive dislike, scowled and started to rise from the corner where he was playing with a heap of shining pebbles.

"Be still, *mi niño*," Malena admonished him. "The man is hungry."

She herself had no misgivings. Here was a soldier of her country, a compatriot, who had clearly traveled far and was in need of hospitality. Whatever she had to spare was his to command.

She bustled about the little room, and soon set before the stranger a bowl of goat's milk and a plate of *enchilladas*. Wolfing it down, the man interspersed his ravenous bites with grunts of animal satisfaction.

When he had finished, Malena, eager for news, asked courteously:

"*Amigo*, how does it go with the army? Have the Americans been defeated?"

The soldier spat disgustedly.

"Ah, *Dios!*" he snarled. "How do you expect it to go, my sister, when we have sheep for men and dogs for leaders? The dogs drive us into the teeth of the wolves, and when we are cut to ribbons they drink our blood."

"What do you mean?" Malena questioned in astonishment.

"It is plain that you know little of war in this village. Me, I know more. I would sell my knowledge cheap enough, if any would pay for it. But knowledge brings no price here. You have seen my hunger and fed me. Behold the rags that were once a uniform. See here—" and he bared his hairy chest—"here are wounds suffered for Mexico. These are all the wages I got for my pains. If there were any use in it all—but there is never any use. Christ is dead, the saints asleep, and the Virgin is busy looking out for officers."

"But what is the trouble? What has happened?"

"This has happened. I, my sister, am one of many thousand fools who trusted Santa Anna. Two months ago I stood, with eight thousand other fools, at Cerro Gordo, in the path of the American advance. The Yankees had landed shortly before at Vera Cruz, bombarded and captured the city, and marched inland. That was but purgatory, as the devil said to the toasting sinner. For look you, their way led through the pass of Cerro Gordo, and we held the pass. Our cannon, from the hill of Cerro Gordo, commanded the narrow pass; and strong batteries on our right and center swept the road and the plain. Our rear

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was protected by the river, the Rio del Plan, too swift for even Yankees to ford.

"We were brave enough, we poor devils, but we had, as I say, dogs to lead us. The dogs left a hole for the wolf to crawl through. Santa Anna, whom may Satan roast in blue sulfur, refused to fortify Atalaya Hill, close to the height of Cerro Gordo. The Yankees stormed the hill, rushed our breastworks from there, cut off our retreat, and bagged the army. Of our eight thousand, three thousand were caught in the trap. Guns, ammunitions, camp, and equipment, all were taken.

"Together with the rest of the prisoners, I was released on parole, and had the pleasure of walking back to my village. I live near Queretaro, more than three hundred miles from Cerro Gordo. Well, it was a long walk; but it was better than standing up to be shot by Americanos, while rascals in epaulets bedeviled us from a safe distance. As for that limping cur, Santa Anna, he fled for his life as soon as he saw how the battle was going. Trust him to bide where the work is light and safe."

Malena, who had listened to his story with rising dismay, protested at this arraignment of her idol.

"You have indeed suffered for your country," she said; "but I think your sufferings have made you unjust to our President. Doubtless he did all he could to save the day, but his generals are neither so brave nor so able as he."

The soldier broke in savagely.

"They are all daubed with the same pitch," he snarled. "There is not one of them whose flesh a vulture would not despise. As for Santa Anna, he is the mangiest hound of the pack. I tell you, he stayed in the rear, shielded from the sun, safe from the bullets, with his game-cocks and his mistresses. When things got hot, he put his tail between his legs and ran. Why, even one of his harlots was captured. Do you think he stayed to see how the poor wench fared?"

Malena's eyes flashed, and she drew herself up proudly.

"You have eaten my bread," she stormed. "You have sat in my house and found shelter beneath my roof! Yet you are not ashamed to tell me, a woman who loves her country, that our brave President ran like a coward! I have heard enough of your lies. Leave my house, or I will speak one word to this officer, and have you thrown out into the dust!"

The Mexican rose to his feet, scowling savagely. He thrust one hand into his breast, as if fumbling for his knife; and Culver rose from his corner, fierce and menacing. One look at him was enough. The soldier backed toward the door, where he stood for a moment to deliver himself of a parting threat.

"I go," he announced. "Call off your imbecile. When I return, those I bring with me will know how to deal with you and your——"

Culver sprang for him, but the Mexican leaped swiftly outside and was gone.

His words left Malena startled and shaken. So long as she and Culver remained in Dolores without attracting attention, all was like to go well with them; but she could not afford to make enemies. Deserters from Santa Anna's army roamed the country, preying alike on each other and on peaceful citizens. Many bands of armed thieves were abroad; and if, as she feared, this man were in touch with them, he might easily lead a gang of cutthroats to the village, kill Culver, and carry her off to what she did not like to contemplate. From that time on, she took care to keep in touch with Padre Ramón, to whom she confided her fears.

The good priest shared her anxiety, but could offer her no protection. His man Pancho was always at her disposal, he assured her, but one Indian lad could be of little use against well-armed bandits.

A month more passed by, with no further word of the soldier. Gradually Malena's fears became a part of the forgotten past; and, when she thought of the fellow, it was with contempt rather than with fear. Then, one July evening, the blow fell.

She was returning from the Padre's, Culver beside her as usual. The sun was just going down; and, as they approached the house, whose interior was already dark, a rope whizzed through the air, and Culver was thrown to the ground. Before he could rise, three men dashed out of the hut and fell upon him. In a moment his hands were bound behind his back, strong arms urged him to his feet and held him fast.

Half a dozen other men came out from behind the house, and stood by, mocking grins on their faces. One of them advanced to Malena, shook a fist under her nose, and

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jeered at her. It was their guest of a month before.

"So," he gibed, "you thought a soldier of Mexico could be insulted without danger, little one? It is not so, as you see. These gentlemen here are on the watch for tall lads like yours, to stop American bullets. If you love your country as you boasted, you will not object to giving her a soldier."

Malena stared at him in dumb horror. These men, she knew, were a recruiting party in search of "volunteers," whom they enlisted by the simple process of applying superior force. Many a Mexican wife and mother had seen her men torn from her side to fill the ranks of Santa Anna's armies.

There was nothing to be done, and she knew it. The thought of resistance or even protest was absurd. The happiness of the months that had gone—such as it was—was past forever. Her lover, her poor, crazed child of a lover, would be taken to Mexico City and forced to bear arms against his own countrymen. Well for him, she thought, that his mind was incapable of comprehending what awaited him.

"You are strong, and I am helpless," she told them. "Yet, if you have wives and loved ones at home, do not separate us. Let me go with him. Many women have gone to the front with their men. I am able to do what they have done."

"As you like," answered the gruff sergeant in command. "My woman went with me. If tall Gomez here offers to harm you, or opens his mouth to you again, I will deal with him myself. *Adelante!*"

The press-gang swung down the path to the road, the same path by which Malena and Culver had mounted to the safety and calm of Dolores in the Spring. That was all over now, and the saints knew what lay before them.

Urged on by his guards, Culver walked along sullenly, Malena by his side. Now they reached the road and marched south in the soft, fragrant dark, toward the threatened city of Mexico.

CHAPTER XV

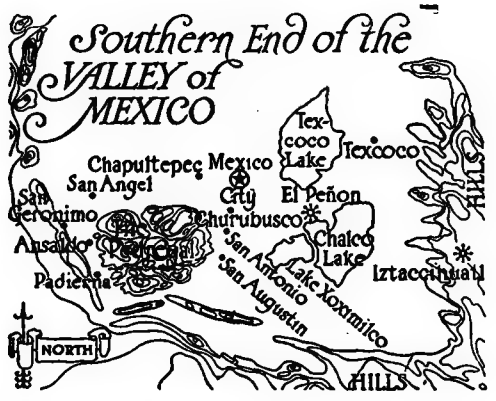
CONDEMNED

THREE days out from Puebla, the American vanguard—Harney's brigade of dragoons and Twiggs's division—reached the summit of the pass. To the south towered the vast snow-crowned bulk of Iztaccihuatl, the "White Lady;" to the west, spread out before the eyes of the triumphant troops in glorious beauty, thousands of feet below them, lay the Valley of Mexico.

In the thin air, every object stood out as if near at hand. At the foot of the mountain-wall, great green stretches of woodland were succeeded by level fields of young corn, as high as a man. Beyond these stretched the plains, their expanse broken by the broad blue lakes of Chalco and Texcoco, girdled with wide stretches of swampy meadow-land. North of the lakes, and dominating the valley and its scattered villages, rose the goal of American hopes, the queenly city of Mexico.

Wild hurrahs of thunderous joy burst from the soldiers' throats. The victors of Monterey, Vera Cruz, and Cerro Gordo let loose the pent-up fervor of three long months in one tremendous volleying roar.

Before them lay the city of Montezuma, theirs to take as Cortez had taken it three hundred and twenty-eight years before. From these very mountains had the great Conquistador looked down on his rich spoil, and from here had swept down upon it as they would sweep down now.



As the cavalry stood outlined against the sky, a single cannon-shot thundered from the valley below them. In answer to it, a second faintly echoed in the farther distance. Though their ears could not hear it, a third roared out from in front of the National Palace in the city; and the anxious crowd of citizens packed into the great plaza burst into tumultuous cheers. It was the long-awaited signal-gun, which was to summon all Mexicans between fifteen

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and sixty to the fortified points of the capital to defend their threatened city.

The four new organizations of the National Guard, the men of the Victoria, Hidalgo, Independencia, and Bravo battalions, thronged to their respective headquarters; the numerous military bands broke into the strains of patriotic airs. Men and women of all classes, united in the common enthusiasm of love of country, shouted, cheered themselves hoarse, sang in joyful abandon, and shrieked and laughed boisterously to one another. The blue-bloods of the Victoria and Hidalgo cheered the mechanics of the Bravo and Independencia, and were cheered in their turn.

"*Mueran los Gringos!*" roared the crowd. "Death to the invader! *Viva Mexico!*"

Late that afternoon—August 10, 1847—the devoted volunteers marched out of the city, bearing the blessing of the archbishop. Their uniforms were decorated with flowers; bright blossoms protruded from the muzzles of the muskets and adorned the trappings of the horses. Women cheered them from the housetops and balconies, and a rout of children paraded in ecstatic enthusiasm at their heels.

Straight for the rocky, fortified hill of El Peñon, seven miles from the city, the citizen army marched, and in the spirit of those who make holiday awaited the advance of the Americans. For five days they waited, while their friends in the capital came out on foot, on muleback, or in carriages, to visit the brave defenders. It was a grand lark, with the joyful prospect of a decisive meeting with their northern enemies and of a triumphant repulse of the American invasion.

But the Americans did not come. Scott, having discovered the strength of the defenses at the Peñon and Mexicalcingo, had decided not to attack these mighty gates of the city, but to turn them. Leaving General Twiggs and his veteran command at Ayotla to threaten the fortifications and deceive the enemy, he ordered the rest of his forces westward, passing south of Lake Chalco, to gain the highway which led north from Cuernavaca to the city of Mexico. This involved abandoning his communications entirely; but fired by the example of Cortez, Scott chose to "draw the sword and cast the scabbard behind him."

Santa Anna, who had collected about twenty thousand men to meet Scott's ten thousand, was keenly disappointed by his enemy's refusal to throw himself upon the almost impregnable defenses of the Peñon and Mexicalcingo. Knowing full well the significance of Scott's maneuver, however, he sent the discontented National Guards back to the city, leaving General Herrera in charge of the forts, and ordered the greater part of his forces to the fortified suburbs of San Antonio and Churubusco, covering what seemed the only practicable means of approaching the city left to the Americans.

General Valencia, with four thousand of the Army of the North—the remnants of Buena Vista—had come down from San Luis Obispo, and was now ordered to Texcoco, east of the lake of that name, to take in the rear any American force that might attempt to surprise the Peñon.

Valencia, however, being no friend of Santa Anna's, chose to march west and south, without orders, round to the diametrically opposite side of Mexico City, to watch the San Angel road, taking with him a force of cavalry under General Torrejon. In this, he acted more shrewdly than Santa Anna; for his movement brought him into a position to cut off Scott from the city by occupying the road leading north from Cuernavaca through San Angel to the capital. Reconnoitering in the direction of Contreras, he decided that by making a stand at the neighboring hill of Padierna, the Mexican army could either intercept a possible march on the city by the San Angel road, or by a rapid retreat reach Churubusco in time to prevent the Americans from reaching the city via San Augustin and San Antonio.

Scott's army had advanced as far as San Antonio when it became apparent that an attack on the powerful fortifications and heavy batteries of that castle-like hacienda would amount to self-destruction; and it was determined to fall back to San Augustin and thence to strike through the Pedregal to the San Angel road.

The Pedregal, a bleak, black stretch of barren lava, extended between the two highroads to the southern gates of the city, and seemed an insuperable obstacle to any army. Seamed and jagged, cut by huge fissures and deep ravines, it defied the advance of cavalry and threatened the destruction of any who attempted to cross it. The only

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practicable path was a mule-track which wound from San Augustin to the ranch-house of Padierna. Only at Padierna could the American army emerge from the evil waste of the Pedregal; and at Padierna, behind strong entrenchments, Valencia's host was waiting.

On the left of Valencia's line, protected by a deep ravine, were the troops of San Luis Potosi; on the right, the brigade of Cabrera. The eastern slope, facing the Pedregal, was steep and sheer, obscured by trees and rocks, and bristling with batteries.

At the bottom of the hill, detachments of lancers and infantry held the nearer bank of the Magdalena Brook; and the interval between the hill and the edge of the lava flow was covered with skirmishers. In the rear of the center batteries Valencia had placed his headquarters, back of which lay his second line. A mile to the north, at the ranch of Ansaldo, were his reserves.

"MAY the Virgin forget to intercede for you and your big imbecile!" stormed an unkempt Mexican officer. "May Satan seize San Luis and all that ever came out of it, that we had the misfortune to pick you up there! Your fool can not learn, does not know enough to load and fire a musket, and it is unsafe to let him near a firearm. He is as helpless as a child of five years; and yet, Mother of God, how much good food he can eat!"

Malena shrugged her shoulders, and Culver grinned with vacant amiability. It was true, what the officer had said. *El niño fuerte*, from the first day of his forced service, had been of no use at all to the army that had impressed him. His malady had rendered him worse than useless as a soldier.

As for Malena, from the beginning she had consoled herself with the thought that sooner or later she would be able to meet Santa Anna, and perhaps procure the exchange or release of her lover. But Valencia's failure to obey orders had taken his army farther and farther away from the immediate command of the President; and now, with the enemy between them and Santa Anna's headquarters at San Antonio, there was neither opportunity nor time for the girl to seek him out, nor could she leave Culver if there were.

Since he was of no military value to the defense, Culver had been employed digging intrenchments; and even there he would work only at the bidding of Malena and under her eye. So she stayed ever with him, fearing lest his inability or unwillingness to obey some order might result in serious consequences. After the work of intrenching was accomplished, and while Valencia was awaiting some activity on the part of the Americans, the amiable lunatic was allowed the freedom of the camp.

On the afternoon of the nineteenth, Valencia received word from his outposts on the hill of Zacatepec that the Americans were advancing across the Pedregal. Smith's brigade of Twiggs's division, leading the advance, soon came in contact with Valencia's patrols and drove them back in headlong disorder. After a hot exchange of musketry between the skirmishers of both sides, the Americans were checked by the ravine, and the opposing forces faced each other across the brook in front of Padierna Hill.

On the American side, Magruder's field battery and a few mountain howitzers were brought up with huge labor and went into action at the top of the slope on their side of the ravine. For hours the artillery on both sides blazed away. The light American pieces maintained a plucky fire; but, outranged and outweighed by Valencia's heavier metal, one piece after another was put out of action. Only the poor aim of the Mexicans saved Magruder's battery—whose second-lieutenant, by the way, was Thomas J. Jackson, not yet known as "Stonewall"—from utter destruction.

An hour before sunset, the Mexican artillery had definitely established its superiority. The lighter pieces were now advanced to the very edge of the ravine: among them, four bronze six-pounders, the very guns of Culver's battery, captured at Buena Vista.

His dull mind vaguely attracted by the sound of the firing, Culver wandered over from his company's position on the left to the center of the line, and stood gazing down at the roaring batteries on the slope below. None interfered with him, and no danger threatened him, for the American guns were outranged and nearly silenced by the Mexican fire.

Discipline was in abeyance, anyhow; for Valencia's army, half-trained at best and now full of the rawest of raw recruits, was allowed its own sweet will when not actually engaged. The perfect safety of their

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position, protected by their heavy guns, tempted the excited infantrymen to crowd about the top of the hill, watching with shrill-voiced enthusiasm the discomfiture of the American artillery.

As his own light battery went into action, Culver's eyes lighted; his vacant features became keen with interest. His torpid brain, unable to take in anything of what was happening, yet stirred with some faint pulse of perception or memory. His body quivered like that of an excited animal.

Making queer little noises in his throat, he crept forward slowly, as if drawn against his will, down the slope toward the four bronze six-pounders. The infantrymen thronging the crest, engrossed in cheering the effect of the Mexican fire, took no notice of the imbecile's movements.

As the sturdy little pieces barked in chorus, Culver plunged forward swiftly and more swiftly, and at last stopped just in the rear of the line of guns. The last light of the setting sun, reflected from their well-polished bronze, they poured forth their deadly hail on the American gunners. *El niño fuerte* took advantage of an interval between shots, while the pieces were being unskilfully reloaded, to pat one of the shiny breeches, as if it were a live thing that pleased him.

Then his eye was caught by some object on the ground back of the gun. He stooped, picked up a broken sponge-staff, and stood looking at it with uncomprehending eyes.

Something stirred in his brain; and still unrealizing, he bent down again, trying to fit together the broken pieces of the sponge-staff. Before he knew what was happening, the gun was fired with a terrific roar; and surging back with the recoil, the carriage leaped upon him, the tire of the right wheel striking him a grazing blow on his lowered head. Loud laughter burst from the throats of the gun-crew at the sight of the imbecile's discomfiture.

El niño fuerte was knocked sprawling and never rose again. It was no amiable lunatic who sprang up in his place, but a man in full possession of his senses and in a most unamiable mood. He was once more Harry Culver, captain of Flying Artillery, aware that he had been knocked down by a blow from behind, and desperately anxious to get to his feet again before he was bayoneted. For to him, the half-year that had passed was but an instant, and he thought he was still fighting the battle of Buena Vista.

As he had stood, so he stood now with his back to the gun-wheel, a clubbed sponge-staff in his hands, and a fierce battle-light in his eyes. Small blame to the startled gun-crew that they shrank from closing with this now dangerous lunatic, whose strength was famed throughout the Army of the North. The misunderstanding on both sides was singularly perfect.

Then came the pompous battery-commander, full of wrath at the interruption.

"Out of the way, dog!" he cried, bringing down the flat of his saber on Culver's back.

With a roar of rage, the American swung his uncouth club with a force that would have crushed the officer's skull like an egg-shell, had it not been that Culver was still unaware that the sponge-staff he now held was broken and so missed his aim. But not altogether. The wet sponge on the end of the staff struck the vizor of the officer's shako, knocking him down and painting his face coal-black with a filthy solution of burnt gunpowder and water.

Then straight at the gun-crew Culver hurled himself, flailing about him savagely, and quite unconsciously cursing in loud and fluent English. For a moment the Mexicans stared in utter astonishment; then, realizing that they had to deal with a ferocious enemy, perhaps a madman and certainly a Yankee, they leaped on him from all sides.

With all his mighty strength he struggled; but the odds were too great, and he was dragged down and overpowered by numbers. Four gunners dragged him up the slope toward headquarters; and, the light being now too poor for accurate shooting, the officer whom he had attacked followed to bring accusation in person against him. In the meantime, saved by the swift descent of the semi-tropical night, Magruder's battery withdrew to the edge of the Pedregal.

All this Malena had seen as she sped down from the crest of the hill; and now, realizing her lover's peril, she followed the captive, struggling with his guards, down the lines to the tent of General Valencia. She had little confidence in her ability to save Culver now: she was no longer Captain Hidalgo, but a woman, unknown and without influence. In all Mexico the only men who knew the identity of Hidalgo and Malena were Culver, Padre Ramón, and Santa Anna—and Santa Anna was miles

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away, holding San Antonio. Nevertheless she followed on, hoping against hope that Valencia would listen to her plea for mercy.

General Valencia, commander of the Army of the North, and political enemy of Santa Anna, sat at his camp-table, immersed in the third of a series of frantic letters to the President, urging Santa Anna to order the whole army to reenforce him at Padierna before morning. Flushed with his first success, torn with fear and anxiety lest his superior refuse his request, and throw the responsibility of a possible defeat on him, Valencia was in no mood to make a long matter of an affair of discipline. He looked up impatiently from his work, with a bellowed—

"Well?"

"Your Excellency," began the outraged artillery officer, mopping his face, "this prisoner is an American, whom we discovered in our lines. He attempted to interfere with the serving of my battery, and when I ordered him away, he attacked me. I respectfully suggest——"

Valencia flung back to his writing.

"Shoot him as soon as it is light!" he snapped.

CHAPTER XVI

THROUGH STORM AND DARKNESS

HIDDEN in the dark outside the tent, Malena heard the sentence and choked back a sob of anguish. Not having understood the cause of his arrest, she did not know that Culver had returned to his full senses and, by his speech, proclaimed himself an American. It was in his character as a crack-brained peon, therefore, that she intended to represent him to Valencia, hoping to excite the General's pity by an appeal to him to spare one whom God had already grievously afflicted.

No sooner had the guard marched out with their prisoner than she emerged from behind the tent-flap and stood in the entrance, waiting for Valencia to look up and see her. But she was rudely thrust aside by a burly officer, who forced his way past her, breathing as from great exertion.

"Your Excellency," the officer began, without waiting for the general to take notice of him.

Valencia looked up from his papers, a savage scowl on his face. Noting the heavy, brutal features of the man, Malena knew that she would need all her powers of persuasion to stir pity in his heart.

"I bring dispatches and a verbal message from his Excellency the General-President Santa Anna," continued the newcomer, a colonel of hussars.

With a flourish that sorted ill with his obvious haste, he presented a large sealed envelope. Not deigning to receive it, Valencia broke in with a contemptuous snarl:

"That is a lie! I have already written enough to his Excellency, and heard enough from him, to know that he has said all he has to say to me. We understand each other. But go on with the tale. When did you leave the President?"

"Not two hours ago, I——"

"That also is a lie. President Santa Anna is at San Antonio, standing off a wretched handful of Americans, while I have been holding off the main Yankee army here, with no help from him. Unaided, I have engaged and defeated the enemy, putting them to ignominious flight. If you had left San Antonio two hours ago, as you say, it would have been impossible for you to be here now. You would have needed many hours for the journey alone, and many more to evade the Yankee patrols between here and San Angel. You have no wings; therefore it is obvious that you do not tell the truth."

"But your Excellency," the colonel protested, "the President is no longer at San Antonio, but at San Angel, having marched to your relief last night. It was easy for me, a fair horseman, to make the few miles between San Angel and Padierna in an hour or two. As for the Americans, I saw nothing of them since I dodged their outposts at San Geronimo. From there on, the road was clear."

Valencia brought his fist down upon the table.

"Aha!" he cried in triumph. "Did I not tell you I have whipped the dogs? They fled in disorder and are doubtless running for their lives down the road to San Augustin. That is why they failed to intercept you."

"Accept my compliments on your glorious victory, my general. Have I your permission to deliver my message?"

"As you please," answered Valencia, who was considerably mollified by this tribute to his prowess.

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The hussar officer once more extended his letters, which Valencia opened and read. Their contents appeared to anger him, for he turned to the bearer with a black frown.

"And now, sir," he barked, "the oral message?"

"This, my general: His Excellency, the President, requests me to urge upon you, with all the eloquence at my command, the danger of remaining here an hour longer. He did not know that you had so splendidly beaten our enemies; but he is assured that the entire force of the Americans is not yet here, and that General Scott will appear shortly before your position with the remainder of the troops under his command. If he is able to seize the roads between here and the city, you will be cut off. Therefore it is the President's wish that you fall back at once to San Angel, and there join forces with him. We can then confront the Americans with a superior force."

"But I tell you there are no more Americans!" Valencia bellowed, his temples fairly swelling with anger. "I have swept away Scott and his army as the norther sweeps away the mosquitoes. It will take them days before they can collect their forces again, perhaps weeks. If President Santa Anna were half the general he should be, he would leave off telling me to withdraw before a beaten enemy, and would march with all his troops to Padierna. There is no other position so well suited as this to block any possible advance on the city. We can wait here till the imbecile Yankees recover, and shatter them again, as I have already shattered them today."

"But my general——"

"But nothing! You are a fool, and Santa Anna is another. While he has been urging me to withdraw like a coward, I have been saving Mexico. And, please God, I will save her again. If he is a patriot, he will reinforce me; if not, let him skulk at San Angel. Mexico and I do not need him. That is all. You may go."

Bowing low to hide his chagrin, the officer departed.

MALENA had left some time before. Quite unwittingly, the President's messenger had brought her the best news in the world. Santa Anna was at San Angel, and the roads clear of Americans. If she left at once, she could reach headquarters long before midnight, identify herself and tell her story to Santa Anna, who would surely grant her a stay of execution. Doubtless he would even permit Harry to be exchanged. Before dawn she would be back at Padierna, once more in the uniform and character of a Mexican officer, and save her beloved.

She looked down at her bare brown feet, now hardened by months of tramping the roads unshod. They would not grow weary.

She crept away from the tent, stole quietly through the second line of troops, now bivouacking where they had stood, crossed the crest and climbed, carefully and laboriously in the dark, down the steep slope toward Ansaldo.

The night was pitch-black, and a few great drops of rain fell spatteringly. A rising wind, smelling of storm, played with her half-loosened hair and ballooned her torn, patched dress. Doubly fearful of discovery, now that the most precious life in the world depended on her success, she took advantage of every boulder, every tree and clump of bush.

Faster and faster came the drops of rain, and the wind rose higher every moment. She shivered at its touch, for it was bitterly cold and she was thinly clothed. Just as she reached the bottom of the hill, the storm fell with a roar and enveloped her in a rush of wind and water. For a moment she staggered blindly, uncertain of direction, even of the road; then her stunned senses reasserted themselves, and she ran into the teeth of the tempest.

Shd did not know how long she fought her way against the furious gale. On and on she stumbled, the high heart in her breast forcing her ahead. Now and again, with an access of strength, the howling wind would stop her in her tracks; but always she gathered herself again, though her lungs ached and throbbed, and pushed forward blindly up the road.

Fear gave her a power she had never known before. Not expecting the storm, she had hoped to be able to make better speed. Whatever happened to her, she much reach Santa Anna in time. Once at San Angel, with the pardon in her grasp, she could get a horse for the return journey. All depended on her reaching San Angel swiftly.

Suddenly, out of the blackness of the night, something reached out and seized

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her. She wrenched herself free and tried to run past, only to run full into the arms of a man. Once more she pulled away, and, her heart beating wildly with fear, ran back down the road. She had hardly gone five paces, when she struck against a solid, unyielding body, which grasped and held her struggling form with an irresistible strength.

"Be all the saints, 'tis a woman!" her captor ejaculated. "Wan of you lads strike a light, if th' rain will let ye."

A moment passed. Then a light flared before her face. Malena blinked painfully in the glare.

"Holy Virgin! It's Miss Fortescue! Whativer brought ye to these parts, and at this time av night? If it's yerself ye are, and not yer ghost?"

The speaker held the flame up to his own face: the pleasant face of Lieutenant Wolf Tone O'Brien, Fourth U. S. Artillery.

Malena gasped with surprise and terror.

"Let me go!" she cried. "Let me go, or it will be too late!"

"Too late for what? Sure, we'd let ye go, if the roads was safer. 'Tis a grand mystery to me how ye got away from the Greasers at Bueny Vista, but ye can't be certain of escapin' the murderin' thieves again. Ye're safe with us."

In desperation, Malena made to run past him. But his powerful arm went out and closed around her shoulders.

"It's no use, me brave girl," O'Brien assured her. "Ye'd not be safe on the roads alone, with the inimy just beyant, and bands av thim prowlin' all round."

"Oh, let me go!" she wailed again. "They'll kill him! He has only me to save him!"

"Kill who?" O'Brien queried, his voice thin with curiosity and doubt. "Who's the lad ye're after savin'?"

"Harry—Harry Culver!"

"My God, girl! Ye're crazy! Captain Culver was killed at Bueny Vista, fightin' like a hero, God rest him!"

"No!" she cried fiercely. "He was taken prisoner. They're going to shoot him at dawn. If you will only let me go to Santa Anna! Santa Anna will pardon him!"

O'Brien barely suppressed a whoop of pure joy.

"Holy Virgin!" he ejaculated piously. "Is himself here at Padierna?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Have the Mexicans anny outposts, this side av the ridge?"

"No! But what do you want? I must go—at once!"

"Ye'll stay here. It's a good night's work ye've done, I'm thinkin'. O'Shaughnessy, me bhoy, jist scutter off an' see if the lady's right about the outposts. An' look ye're not gone too long."

It seemed a lifetime to Malena, that wait in the drenching darkness. O'Brien's blue overcoat was about her soaked shoulders, but she trembled with cold and fright. The lieutenant swore softly and melodiously to himself as he waited, impatiently enough, for the return of his scout.

At last the soft-stepping O'Shaughnessy returned.

"Divil an outpost sir," he reported.

"The powers be thanked! Ye'll not nade to trouble Santy Anna to save th' captain this night, Miss Fortescue. We'll be after takin' that little job off his hands."

"No! No!" cried Malena, horrified with the turn events were taking. "You can do nothing with this handful!"

"This handful," said O'Brien crisply, "stays where it is. Sergeant Sanger, ye're in charge. Ye know what to do? Good! And now, Miss Fortescue, take my arm, if ye plaze, and I'll take ye to a better place than this."

Together they walked for a mile or more down the muddy path. Whenever O'Brien tried to ask her about Culver or herself, Malena would pretend to misunderstand him in the howling gale, knowing that he would not raise his voice above the storm. Just as she was bracing herself to wrench away from him and dash into the darkness, they were challenged by another American outpost. A few words from O'Brien and they were passed through.

Then they came to a solid mass of soldiers standing at ease on either side of the road, silent, almost unseen, but smelling powerfully of wet wool and leather.

"Who are these?" whispered Malena.

"The ould regiment, God bless it!"

"American artillery—*here!*"

"Servin' as red-legged infantry. Sure, we couldn't have brought guns with us across the Pedregal to San Geronimo."

Across the Pedregal to San Geronimo! If he had said "Across the Atlantic in a pontoon," Malena could not have been more astonished at the magnitude of the

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feat. The great lava-field was firmly believed to be impassable save by the mule-track leading to Padierna, where Valencia confidently waited.

"But how!" gasped Malena. "But how——"

"Ye may well ask," said O'Brien. "Sure, we came across as the divil went through Athlone—wan long leap after anither. Many's the crack in that black nightmare av a place would hold a thousand men—and many's the brave lad lyin' in the bottom of those chasms this night, with his broken firelock beside his broken body. But the rest av us are here, praise be, ready and wishful to pay our respects to ould Valencia in the mornin'."

"How dare you attack his army with one lone regiment——"

"Lone regiment, is it? Three brigades, no less: Smith's, Riley's, and Cadwalader's; with Shield's, they say, to follow. Ye can see for yerself—here we are in San Geronimo now."

The little Mexican village was crammed with American troops. Soldiers were everywhere, jammed in the houses for shelter, packed under the scant protection of the dripping eaves, crowding every street and alley. Shivering in their wet clothes, the infantrymen steamed like horses with the animal heat of their close-crowded bodies, which was enough to make their flesh crawl with clammy sweat but not enough to warm them.

Their numbers seemed incalculably swelled by the darkness, and the murmur of their voices rose like the hum of many swarms of bees. Here and there the faint glow of a pipe or a cigaret struggled against the rainy night; otherwise, all was black, formless and ominous. There was something terribly purposeful in these hundreds and hundreds of half-seen figures, all the more threatening for their semi-invisibility.

Shouldering a way through the dense throng, O'Brien led Malena into the village church. There General Persifer F. Smith, the senior brigadier, sat at the head of an improvised table, with General Cadwalader and Colonel Riley facing each other at his right and left.

As O'Brien entered, Smith looked up with a frown from the map before him, on which the forefinger of a tall, athletic, and strikingly handsome captain of engineers standing behind the general's chair had been pointing out the details of Padierna and the road to San Angel.

Unabashed by the frown, O'Brien plunged into his business without delay.

"I have to report, sir, that Captain Harry Culver, reported killed at Bueny Vista, is alive and in the hands of Gineral Valencia. I have reliable information that he is sintinced to be shot at sunrise. The Mexicans are not expectin' further trouble, an' have no outposts."

General Cadwalader raised one bushy eyebrow and smiled meaningly at his superior. Riley, however, whose Celtic nature did not take such news so calmly, started to his feet with an exclamation of astonishment.

"What, Culver alive?" he demanded excitedly. "Are ye sure of this, O'Brien? Ar-re ye certain of yer informant's honesty?"

"As I am of me own, sir," the lieutenant replied warmly. "An' as for the matter av th' outposts, I have checked it up by personal observation."

Persifer F. Smith stroked his chin reflectively. The tall captain of engineers beside him spoke now for the first time in a mellow Southern voice.

"If I may be permitted to make the observation, General Smith," he began, "Lieutenant O'Brien's report, whether based on accurate information or not, merely adds force to General Cadwalader's suggestion. If Captain Culver is still alive and in peril, it is so much the more the part of valor and of prudence to attack before morning; if the report is in error, then there is no reason why we should abandon a plan that promises so well already. Since Lieutenant O'Brien has himself established that the enemy has no outposts, the projected attack has so much the better chance of success. Certainly we should lose no chance to rescue a gallant officer, whose self-sacrificing courage may well have saved the day for us at Buena Vista."

General Smith cleared his throat and rose to his feet with the air of a man who sees his duty clear.

"Captain Lee is right," he announced briskly. "We will immediately set about preparations for the attack. Colonel Riley, the Fourth Artillery will lead the advance. Lieutenant O'Brien, your valuable service shall be mentioned in my dispatches after the action."

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Cadwalader, who had been fidgeting about in his chair, now made a suggestion.

"Would it not be an additional assurance of success," he urged, "if word were sent to General Scott apprizing him of our intentions and suggesting that he make a demonstration in front to cover our attack?"

"It would," Smith answered, "if there were some way of getting word to him. But the Pedregal is unsafe enough at all times, and at night, in a storm of wind and rain, it would be sheer murder to send any man across it."

Captain Robert E. Lee's melodious drawl again broke the silence.

"Having made observations on the Pedregal with some care, I think I can assure General Smith of my ability to recross it tonight. And I have the honor to volunteer my services as dispatch-bearer."

"At night? In this weather?" Smith exclaimed in alarm.

"It is but risking one life on a chance of saving many, general."

"Very well. You may leave at once. Gentlemen, in all my life I have never heard of or seen an example of greater physical or moral courage. That is all."

As the great Virginian strode out into the night, courteously raising his forage-cap as he passed her in the doorway, though he had no reason to suspect her of being anything but a peasant girl of the lowest class, Malena looked up at him with awe and admiration. What a man he was—what men they all were, these terrible invaders of her country. God save Mexico!

IN THE dobe shack where he had been confined, crowded into the muddiest, leakiest corner of the hut by his guards, Culver was racking his puzzled brains to account for the surprising happenings of the last few hours. Newly restored to sanity and manhood, he was quite unconscious of the six months that had passed between his fall at Buena Vista and his reawakening at Padierna. To him it was the close—and the loss—of the battle in which he had lost his guns: he had but now lived over his last stand, the slaughter of his men, and the capture of his battery.

For some unknown reason, he, a prisoner of war, as he conceived himself, had been sentenced to death like a guerrilla. If he had not been hustled away, he would have protested hotly to Valencia against the murder of an officer taken in battle.

A dull anger surged through him. Couldn't the Mexican general have seen that he was in uniform? He glanced down at his ragged cotton drawers and experienced a tremendous shock of surprise. He was not in uniform! These filthy, disreputable rags, tattered and caked with the wear and the dirt of many weeks, were most assuredly not the trim gray and scarlet light-artillery trousers in which he had gone to battle, as he thought, that very morning. As the light of the guttering tallow candle fell on his lower legs, he started in incredulous alarm. He was wearing sandals.

In Heaven's name, what had happened to him? He passed his hand over his aching head and encountered the swelling caused by the recent blow from the gun-wheel. Could he have been knocked unconscious and somehow shifted into this absurd costume? Incredible! The memory of Buena Vista was all he had to go on; and, strengthened by the recollection of his recent struggle at the gun, it constituted assurance enough that, whatever had happened to him, he could not have lost consciousness for any length of time.

Irritated by an acute itching in his right cheek, Culver raised his hand to his face. Good God! Where was he? What, in Heaven's name, had happened to him? He had shaved clean two days before Buena Vista; and now his hand encountered a six-months' beard, rough and matted.

Now he knew that many months had passed since. Suddenly there came to him the memory of Malena as he had last seen her, riding gallantly at the head of her charging host, leading the attack on his battery.

"Tell me," he demanded of the nearest of his guards, "how fares it with Captain Hidalgo?"

"I know nothing of your Captain Hidalgo," answered the Mexican, holding a looted Swiss watch up the light. "But, if he is dead, you will be with him in two hours."

A DINGY gray light, suffusing the sodden darkness. Long, snaky files of men creeping through the muddy ravine, now slipping back, now climbing on again, up and ever up toward the unfortified rear of Padierna hill.

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The unsentineled crest of the long ridge hid them from sight of those on the other side; the half-dark, every moment lighter, still sheltered them from observation. Silent as the drab dawn itself, they crawled menacingly on.

"IT IS time," said the officer in command of the firing-squad. Swiftly Culver's hands were thrust behind his back and tightly bound.

Two sturdy peons heaved him to his feet and propelled him through the doorway.

It was a bleak, dank morning, the sun hidden behind dirty gray clouds. With his back against an outcrop of trap rock, halfway up the slope, Culver faced his executioners. On either side grinned a crowd of Mexicans who had collected to see the end of the American spy.

Confused and angry, Culver was in no mood for calm acceptance of his fate. He yearned to burst his bonds, to plant his fist in the face of the leering officer and die fighting.

"*Preparen las armas!*"

The firing-squad looked to their priming and brought their rusty pieces to the ready.

"*A punten!*"

A dozen muzzles were focused on Culver's breast. Clearing his throat, the officer opened his mouth to give the final command:

"*Fuego!*"

But instead, he opened his mouth still wider, dropped his sword, and stood staring round-eyed at the top of the hill. Spectators, firing-squad, prisoner, all followed his gaze. Surging over the crest and rushing down upon them, silent and terrible as death, came a long blue line of infantry, their bayonets at the charge.

As the wave of American soldiery swept over the hill, so an access of life, a thrill, half joy, half madness, swept over Culver. Gathering himself together, his arms still bound behind him, he lowered his head like a charging bull and hurled himself straight at the wavering, hesitating firing-squad. His right shoulder sent one spinning; another received his head full in the stomach and fell gasping. Before the rest could do anything, Culver was through and lost in the dense crowd beyond.

From all sides the astounded Mexicans ran from their sleeping-places, bunching together and trampling each other in their alarm. In a moment the Army of the North was turned into a surging, frantic mob.

Only a few officers retained their presence of mind. One, shouting orders at the top of his lungs and laying on with the flat of his saber, drove together some kind of gun-crews, pointed the four captured six-pounders to the rear, and had them run up by hand and fired together. Through the thick cannon-smoke loomed the tall figures of the oncoming Americans. A blast of destruction leaped from their muzzles into the seething mass of Mexicans.

Desperate with terror, the disorganized rabble wavered, fired a few scattered shots, and broke.

As he ran past to the rear, his powder-blackened face livid with hate, the officer who had brought up the guns met Culver straining at his bonds and recognized the man who had struck him the night before. With a shriek of rage, the infuriated officer shortened his saber and lunged at Culver's defenseless breast.

Even as the thrust drove home, a sturdy American hurled himself ahead of his comrade and drove between the point and its intended victim. An instant later, the Mexican fell, transfixed by four bayonets.

Pierced by the murderous saber, the rescuer dropped, bloody and dying, at Culver's feet. Culver looked down at him, rage and pity in his heart, and recognized Lieutenant O'Brien. With one frantic wrench, he burst the ropes which bound him and gathered the wounded man in his arms.

"Wolf!" he cried. "Wolf! Speak to me!"

The Irishman smiled up at him, the light of death in his eyes.

"Captain, dear," he gasped. "We've got—our guns back!" And, with a choking sob, he died.

For a moment Culver held his friend's body in his arms, half-mad with grief and fury; then, laying him gently down, he snatched a sword from the hand of a fallen Mexican. Riley's brigade was already far down the eastern slope, pursuing the fleeing Mexicans with cheers of triumph. The Fourth Artillery, their joy over their reconquered guns turned to rage at the loss of O'Brien, whirled the pieces round with savage cries and trained them on the fugitives. Joining the pursuit, Culver dashed on like an avenging angel, cutting down all he overtook.

Now the brigades of Cadwalader and

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Smith came roaring up on the Mexican right and left. Salas, a sturdy veteran, and an ex-President of Mexico, though he had no time to get his men into any sort of formation, tried valiantly to make a stand. Ordering Torrejon to charge with his lancers, he put to shame the braggart cowardice of Valencia, who could be seen at the very head of the fugitives, spurring his white horse frantically. But, smitten with fear, Torrejon took to headlong flight, his horsemen after him in a wild panic, trampling down the infantry that vainly strove to form and fire.

Gaining the road to San Angel, the Mexicans streamed toward the city; and as they passed San Ansaldo, Shield and Pierce brought their fresh American brigades into the fight, butchering the fleeing men by hundreds. Seventeen minutes after the first shot was fired, the battle was over; seven hundred Mexicans lay dead, eight hundred more were prisoners, and the road toward the capital was a shambles.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FALLEN IDOL

SURGEON-GENERAL LAWSON laid his hand on Culver's head, and, by exerting a slight pressure, indicated that he desired the captain to bend forward so that General Scott could observe and understand.

"As nearly as I can make out the case, general," he expounded, "this healed scar, over which the hair has partly grown again, is the mark of an old wound—doubtless that which Captain Culver received at Buena Vista. We have from his own lips the statement that he remembers nothing between that date and the engagement of Contreras—or, to give it its proper designation, of Padierna. Here is a fresh hurt, partially overlaying the old, and clearly inflicted by some heavy, blunt instrument. The subject must have received this second injury during the first day's fighting at Padierna. It seems clear, then, that the first wound took away his memory; and the second, doubtless relieving the brain of the pressure caused by the first, restored it again."

"This is remarkable, Lawson, truly remarkable," observed Scott. "And you assure me, Captain Culver, that you have positively no recollection of your actions, or even of your whereabouts, during the six months between Buena Vista and Contreras?"

"None whatever, sir," Culver declared. "I was thunderstruck when, after the battle, I found myself in the Valley of Mexico. Though I confess I was no more astonished by the difference in terrain than by the growth of my own beard."

"This is truly the most remarkable event which has ever come to my attention," proclaimed Winfield Scott with more emphasis than variety.

During the conversation, Culver could hardly keep his eyes away from the figure and person of General Scott. Accustomed as he was to the Spartan homeliness and simplicity of Zachary Taylor, he was astonished, and not a little amused, by the pompous formality and dignity of the commander-in-chief.

In spite of the heat, Scott wore the fullest of full-dress uniforms, heavy bullion epaulets and all. On the table before him rested a cocked hat—the first one Culver had seen in Mexico—plumed with gorgeous feathers. If it had not been for the real and obvious strength of the man, with his huge body and stern, characterful face, Culver would have found it difficult to retain respect for him. Culver himself, in preparation for this interview, had had his hair cut and his beard trimmed by the barber who can be found in every regimental band in the world, and had bought, with a note drawn against his accumulated six months' pay, the uniform, horse, and equipment of another captain of the Fourth, killed at Padierna.

"You have not yet been assigned to duty?" the General asked him, as Lawson left for the Mixcoac Hospital.

"No, sir."

"H'm. Excuse me a moment, captain."

Turning to acknowledge the salute of an ornate Mexican officer, who entered at this moment, Scott received from him a sealed envelope, broke the seal, glanced through the contents and nodded.

"That is all, sir," he told the messenger. "Assure President Santa Anna, with my compliments, that I shall send the answer at the time and in the manner designated by his Excellency."

"And now, Captain Culver," Scott continued after the Mexican had saluted and withdrawn, "since you have not yet been

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assigned to duty, you will doubtless be glad to put yourself at my personal disposal for a few hours."

"Entirely so, sir."

"Very good." Pulling open the drawer of his table, Scott drew out a large packet, bound with heavy twine and most elaborately sealed, and handed it to him. "You will take this to President Santa Anna, at the National Palace, at once. You will place it in no other hands but his. You need not stop for an answer. You understand that your mission is strictly confidential. That is all."

Culver saluted and went out. As he mounted his horse, he could not help wondering what could be the nature of the errand on which he had been sent.

Seventeen days had passed since that memorable 20th of August, on which the crushing defeats of Contreras and Churubusco had driven the shattered Mexican armies to seek refuge within the capital itself. Fourteen of those days had been consumed in a futile armistice, during which Mr. Nicholas Trist, the emissary of the State Department, had been in conference with a Mexican commission, considering terms of peace. Neither side had been willing or able to propose terms acceptable to the other; yet a semblance of friendly relations had been maintained, and messengers had gone back and forth constantly between Scott and Santa Anna.

Riding down the hill of Tacubaya, Culver glanced back at the Archbishop's Palace—now Scott's headquarters—from which the Stars and Stripes were flying; and a wave of angry humiliation swept over him. Here, within three miles of the heart of Mexico City, floated the American flag; five hundred yards before him, a battery of American siege-guns seemed to make the menace of that flag very real, and to confirm its assurance of national honor and of protection to the men who stood under its egis. Yet, on the very day when the commissioners of both countries had held their first meeting, unarmed American teamsters had been attacked by a Mexican mob and one of them beaten to death, and an American merchant in the city had seen his store sacked because he tried to sell supplies to his country's troops, according to the specific terms of the armistice.

And now, pondering on these things, Culver weighed the package in his hand and came to a conclusion that was a fresh humiliation. Scott, he knew, sincerely and ardently desired peace, both for the sake of his own political aspirations, and because of the precarious position of his little army.

Rumors had been afloat that the American government was considering the purchase of a satisfactory peace by making a secret loan to the head of the bankrupt Mexican government. Could it be that he, Harry Culver, had been chosen as the bearer of this ignominious and futile tribute? He knew, better than Scott, the treachery and selfishness of Santa Anna, and could already imagine the readiness with which the Mexican President would break all his promises, once he had within his grasp the sinews of war against America, furnished by America herself.

Culver shrugged his broad shoulders and rode on grimly. After all, it was his business to obey orders. He passed the battery and arrived at the junction between the American and the Mexican lines. A troop of lancers rode forth to meet him, a thick-set, scowling officer at their head.

"Are you the emissary of the Yankee general?" he grunted.

Culver nodded, and they fell in behind him.

As they rode past the eastern end of the long ridge of Chapultepec, and turned toward the capital, Culver noted the two diverging causeways leading east and north from this point to the city. Wide and well-built, with five-foot arches and columns four feet thick, supporting the old Spanish aqueducts, they would afford commodious roads and fair cover for an advancing army. Their way lay along the nearer and more direct of the two, the Tacubaya causeway, running between broad marshes.

A mile and a half more brought them to the Belem Gate, through which they rode unchallenged, past the old citadel and many new batteries, lately thrown up as if the failure of the negotiations were a foregone conclusion. Culver smiled to himself as he recalled how the Mexican government had solemnly pledged itself to erect no new fortifications.

His taciturn companion led the way—Culver wondered why the Mexican officer had omitted to insist on the American's eyes being bandaged—through the ragged,

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filthy outskirts of the city, by gradually widening streets into the better quarter. Gangs of *leperos* or professional, able-bodied beggars, fingering their knife-hilts and snarling at the sight of his hated uniform, showed the need for his escort and gave promise of looting and street-fighting, once the city were taken.

At every turn, Culver noted, the pavements had been torn up. And he could see piles of paving-stones heaped up on the flat roofs of the houses on both sides of the road, made ready for a possible American offensive.

They clattered across the great plaza and drew rein in front of the National Palace.

"Wait," ordered the officer curtly and disappeared into the courtyard.

In a few moments, a dandified aide in green and gilt came through the arched entranceway and signed to Culver to dismount and follow him.

Just inside, a splendid carriage was waiting, the arms of the republic emblazoned on its door. The well-groomed, spirited horses, fretting at their bits, were held by a milk-chocolate-colored *mozo*. As they passed the equipage, the aide snapped smartly to attention and saluted.

Out from the palace came a striking pair, in whom Culver had no difficulty in recognizing President and Señora Santa Anna. Stumping along on his famous wooden leg, the middle-aged dictator was conversing in a formal, polished manner with his wife, a girl in her early twenties, tall, and of almost incredible beauty. Her fair complexion and light brown hair made her look more like an Englishwoman than a Mexican; and her ethereal loveliness seemed strangely out of place beside the stern, coarse Latin face and heavy-lidded eyes of her husband.

Catching sight of the American, Santa Anna bowed with stiff dignity and stopped short, waiting for the other to come to him. The glittering aide presented Scott's emissary, who was obliged to salute and walk the entire distance between himself and the President before Santa Anna would give a second sign of having seen him.

Having exacted this tribute to his dignity, the dictator received Culver urbanely, took the proffered packet, and broke the seals. At the sight of the contents, which he shielded behind the wrapping from the eyes of his aide and Culver, his face assumed an air of satisfaction. Thumbing the edges of a thick package of something that rustled crisply, he rewrapped it and placed it most carefully in the innermost pocket of his laced coat. With a few courteous words to Culver, he turned to go; but as Señora Santa Anna took her husband's arm again, the American nearly cried out with surprise. A beautiful lace shawl which had been folded about her neck became displaced revealing a superbly-modeled throat on which hung—there could be no doubt—the identical necklace of priceless emeralds which Culver had last seen in the hand of Malena at Encarnacion, as he climbed through the window to rescue her from the bandit-colonel Pilar! Summoning all his self-possession, he composed his features and returned Santa Anna's salute.

As the President escorted his wife to the carriage, his aide touched Culver's arm.

"*Señor capitán*," he announced, "*El teniente* Lazaro, who escorted you hither, has been ordered to return with his troopers to the Garita San Cosmé. If you will have the goodness to enter—" he indicated the door through which Santa Anna had come—"your new escort will be ready presently."

Culver followed him inside and down a broad, cool corridor into an anteroom, sparsely furnished and uncurtained, but with a rich Brussels carpet—painted on the floor.

Left alone, Culver gave himself over to his emotions. Malena's jewels! So this was the end of her unselfish devotion to Mexico! All the wealth that was hers, for which she had schemed, fought, periled her life, that Mexico might have fresh resources to combat its enemies, now lavished on the throat of a woman who had sacrificed nothing.

He wondered how Malena had managed to get the priceless stones into Santa Anna's hands. His last sight of her had been that mad, wonderful moment of her charge at Buena Vista; for he still remembered nothing of the months of his helplessness at Dolores. At least, she was still alive, thank God! Else her treasure had not found its way to the President.

Where was she now? And did she know what had been the end of her generous gift? Did she know that the sacrifice had been for nothing, that it had gone to fill the pockets of the chief she had idealized, leaving her country as poor as if she had never given it? His heart was full of indignation

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and the greed of this thrice-treacherous, rapacious villain, who bought and sold his country as he would his farm. Oh, if Malena had but known the heart of him she served so faithfully, she might have abjured his service, and been content to give herself to the man she loved! And now he might never see her again.

Hearing a footfall outside, he turned toward the open door. There stood a slender officer in the uniform of a Chapultepec cadet. One look at the handsome, delicate features was enough.

"My God!" he cried. "Malena!"

She stood staring at him with eyes that were wide with amazement.

"Harry! You here? And yourself again?"

With one stride he reached her and swept her into his arms.

"Why not myself?" he asked, as the strangeness of her words penetrated his mind.

"You were so long—different."

"Different? How? Am I changed so much since you rode down upon me so bravely at Buena Vista?"

"Why, Harry! Don't you know? Don't you remember all those months between, when you and I were together?"

He held her off at arm's length, and looked into her great black eyes in puzzled wonder.

"You and I together?" he repeated. "Where? When?"

"You don't remember anything?" Her eyes seemed strangely moist.

Culver sighed and shook his head.

"Nothing, dear. The surgeon tells me that the blow I received on my head at Buena Vista must have robbed me of all memory and personality. I did not come to myself again until a second blow undid the work of the first, seventeen days ago, in the battle of Padierna. All that lies between is an utter blank. All I know is that I found myself on Padierna Hill, fighting for my own guns against a throng of Mexicans. I thought it was still the battle of Buena Vista. I was seized and condemned to be shot; and the next morning, just in time to save me, our troops fell upon Valencia's rear. Lieutenant O'Brien received in his own breast the saber-thrust intended for me."

Malena's eyes brimmed over.

"Poor brave O'Brien! Is he—did he die?"

"He died in my arms."

Both were silent for a moment, then Malena spoke:

"Harry, I wish you could remember. The memory of those months we spent together has been so sweet to me that I want you to share it. Let me tell you about it, and try, please try, to recall just a little bit."

So she told him how he had been rescued from the Mexican knives at Buena Vista; how she had brought him through the desert; of the placid, pleasant life at Dolores, and its sudden termination. Last of all, she told him how she had fled from Padierna, intending to win his pardon of Santa Anna; how, being intercepted by O'Brien, she had given him, in the fever of her grief and fear, the information which led to the American attack; and how, escaping from San Geronimo after the troops had gone, she had joined the Mexican flight from Padierna and found refuge in the city. During the telling, Culver looked down at her with eyes that shone with pride and love.

Suddenly she broke off and drew away from his arms, listening. A second later, Santa Anna's aide entered, saluted, and announced—

"*Caballeros,* the escort is ready."

Malena smiled up at Culver with eyes that somehow did not seem happy.

"*Señor capitán,*" she told him in Spanish, "I have the honor to command the troop which escorts you back to the American lines." In English, she added, "When they told me, I did not dream that it would be you, Harry."

As they rode through the Belem Gate, Culver, gloomily conscious of the eyes of the lancers, urged her to increase the interval between themselves and the troop.

"I have something to say," he told her, "that your men do not need to hear."

Calling out an order in Spanish, she rode ahead with him.

"My dearest, the war is nearly over. If the commissioners reach satisfactory terms, not a single blow will be struck from now on. If not, a few more days of fighting, and the city must fall. Either way, peace is almost at hand. When it is all over, you will come to me. I have waited long for you, and the fortunes of war nearly separated us forever; but soon, perhaps in a few days, your country and mine will be friendly

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once more, and our hearts will find happiness together."

Great tears came into Malena's eyes, and she shook her head wearily.

"If it could only be!" she sighed. "We were not made for happiness, Harry. Your country and mine can never be friends, so long as Mexicans can remember. This war is not yet over, and when it is, there will come other wars. If only I had done my duty, Harry! If it had not been for me, General Valencia might never have been surprised at Padierna. If I had succeeded in my mission, and had brought your report in time to Santa Anna, Mexico would have been victorious at Buena Vista. All that I have undertaken has failed, Harry, and has failed because I did not have the strength to crush my love for you."

"You are wrong!" Culver interrupted. "The attack on Valencia had already been determined. I forced you to come back with me to Aguas Nuevas; you had no choice. Suppose I had not followed you. Could you have escaped from the hands of Pilar in time to bring your information to Santa Anna? Or the jewels, to adorn his wife?"

The scorn in his eyes told her as clearly as his words that he had seen what had become of the jewels.

"You saw them, then?" she asked sadly. "You know?"

"I know. And I suspect, too, that the fact that you live to tell of his treachery accounts for Santa Anna's failure to recognize your splendid service. Captain Hidalgo deserved promotion, not demotion to the rank of sub-lieutenant. Surely, my darling, you know now that he does not deserve your loyalty. You have seen that he is a thief, an incompetent commander, and a traitor. You know that he has abandoned his army time and again to save himself, that he kept your jewels to enrich himself at Mexico's expense, and that he is negotiating at this very moment for terms that will serve his turn, regardless of the fate of his country."

"Yes, I know," Harry. During these months I have seen every ideal crumble, every hope crushed. I have seen Mexico deserted by her soldiers and sold by her leaders. But, oh, how I have striven to keep my own service true and faithful! Harry, you, as a soldier, know what it is to love your country and to fight for her. I love my country, too, and I am strong enough to give up all else, even my love for you, to keep my loyalty unstained. Santa Anna is not worth one drop of blood from the veins of the poorest peon in his army. But Mexico! It is for her that I have lived, and for her I would gladly die."

Culver turned his tortured eyes to hers, pleading desperately.

"But Mexico has lost!" he urged. "There is nothing more you can do. You have given her all you could, and it is useless to sacrifice our happiness now. If it could help your country, I love you enough to give you up to her, to sacrifice all that life holds for us. But the sacrifice is so pitifully useless. Come to me, Malena. Ride with me to our lines. Can't you see that you are breaking both our hearts to no purpose? Give it all up, and come!"

"It is useless, Harry dear. Mexico has not lost yet, either. Chapultepec remains to her and the city. Do you know what they mean to us? I am sure that the negotiations will fail, and that very soon the Americans will attack once more. So long as one Mexican is left alive, so long as one drop of blood flows in the veins of a Mexican woman, we will not give in. Even if our leaders surrender, some of us love our land enough to die rather than see the invader pull down our flag. Between you, an American officer, and me, a Mexican woman and a Mexican soldier, there can be no peace. I have kept the faith, and I will keep it to the end. And for you and me, Harry, the end is reached now. Here our lines end; I must return to duty. Good-by, my brave lover, and remember always that I love you, love you more than you will ever know or dream."

As they drew rein beside the battery, which marked the beginning of No Man's Land, she held out her hand. Culver took it and pressed it, his eyes stinging with repressed tears. In that last moment, a longing for her so fierce, so savage, took possession of him that he lost all sense of the soldiers looking curiously on. Why not seize her, lift her to his horse's back, and ride for the American lines as fast as horseflesh could carry them? Only six hundred yards to go, and he would have her safe in the shelter of the American guns, and he would never let her go.

As swiftly as the thought came to him, he thrust it from him. He was not his own

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master. If he did this thing, the armistice would be broken off and the lives of the men who died would be upon his head, and all hope of peace crushed by his hand. With a bitter sigh of renunciation, he raised her hand to his lips.

Malena pointed up to the grim castle of Chapultepec, towering above them.

"Once more, good-by," she said. "I am stationed here." And she rode slowly to the gate of the outer wall, looking back over her shoulder, her eyes on his, until she was swallowed up in the ominous depths of Chapultepec.

"Pardon, *Señor Americano*," broke in the harsh voice of one who had just ridden up. "It is necessary that you ride back to your lines at once. The armistice has expired."

The cruel irony of it swept over Culver till he shook with futile rage. If he had but known, not all the Mexicans in the land would have prevented him from snatching her up and carrying her off with him. Now it was too late; and she was there in Chapultepec, guarded by Mexican guns. Chapultepec, against which, perhaps in an hour, the full strength of the American forces would be hurled! Against which he himself must turn the muzzles of his murderous artillery!

Spurring his horse savagely, he dashed back to Tacubaya Hill, shaking his fist in fury at the great gray walls behind.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHAPULTEPEC

A CASTLE on a hill, guarding the entrance to the two causeways over which his army must advance to the gates of Mexico City: that was what General Winfield Scott saw as he looked from his headquarters in the Archbishop's Palace toward Chapultepec. To the American gunners, who had been pounding the place with siege-guns and mortars all day Sunday and were now at it again on Monday morning, it was simply a splendid target. To Colonel Xicontencatl, whose troops held the western slope of the hill, Chapultepec was the sacred birthplace of his nation, the spot where his ancestors had found the long-foretold sign of the eagle, serpent, and nopal that meant the end of their wandering and the founding of their city.

To Culver, every screaming shell from the twenty-four-pounders, every huge bomb from the ten-inch mortars, every hit that sent timbers and sand-bags spouting into the air from the shattered bomb-proofs, meant the possible death of Malena. He prayed, as artilleryman never prayed before, that the bombardment might cease and the assault begin.

He knew—and so did everyone in both armies and the thousands of anxious watchers who thronged every tower and housetop in Mexico City—that the fall of Chapultepec meant the fall of the capital and the end of the war. Then would come peace, and for him the winning of his heart's desire, unless—Malena was one of the defenders of Chapultepec, to whose garrison the American soldiers had grimly vowed to give no quarter.

Those same Mexican regulars and National Guardsmen who, with a handful of cadets, now held the castle, had defended Molino del Rey, the long row of thick-walled stone buildings at the foot of the western slope of Chapultepec Hill, when the armistice had been broken off by General Scott. The American commander had done so because he believed a report that Santa Anna, contrary to the terms of the truce, had been casting church-bells into cannon at the Molino. The first assault of the American troops sent to take the supposed foundry had been beaten back, leaving many wounded, whom the Mexicans had bayoneted with great gusto. This had not been forgotten by the men of Pillow's division, now holding the Molino and waiting for the cessation of the bombardment to give them the signal to charge up the long slope and storm the castle.

Culver was there to accompany and support the charge with a battery of mountain howitzers—handy little pieces that could be taken apart and carried wherever a man could climb. (Before that day's fighting was done, one of those guns had been carried up into a church-steeple and there used with great effect by a promising young officer of the Fourth Infantry: Lieutenant U. S. Grant). From the doorways and windows of the Molino, the howitzers spat canister at Xicontencatl's men holding a redan half-way up the slope.

For the fiftieth time since sunrise, Culver looked at his watch, and saw that the hour had come.

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"Cease firing!" he commanded.

Before the smoke of the last salvo had lifted, and as soon as the howitzers could be swung out of their way, the Voltigeur Regiment and the Ninth and Fifteenth Infantry rushed cheering out of the Molino and across the level, swampy ground at the foot of the slope.

A storm of shell and solid shot from the guns of the castle met them as they reached the rude park laid out about the splendid group of noble cypresses called the Grove of the Montezumas. Taking cover behind the huge trunks, the troops pressed on through a rain of falling branches till they came to the open slope beyond.

Seeing that many of his men—young soldiers all—hesitated to leave the shelter of the trees, General Pillow sprang forward, waving them on with his sword, then dropped with a grape-shot through his leg.

With a roar of rage, his men swept forward past their fallen leader and over the redan, bayoneting the defenders. As the gallant Aztec rallied his wavering forces, part of the park wall protecting their left flank suddenly tottered and fell. In through the breach thus made by the crowbars of the pioneers came the Palmetto Regiment of South Carolina, the Second New York, and the Second Pennsylvania. The half-breed conscripts broke and ran; Xicontencatl fell facing the American bayonets as his fathers had faced the spears of Spain.

A Mexican engineer officer, bringing up the rear of the retreat, stopped at a certain point, picked up something from the grass, and then dropped dead with six bullets in him. A cigaret still burned in the dead man's fingers, its lighted end within six inches of the conjoined fuses of two mines capable of blowing up the redan and both brigades of Americans.

REGULARS and volunteers racing side by side, the stormers pressed on, panting in the thin air ten thousand feet above sea-level, blinking in the direct rays of the morning sun, till they came into the long shadow of the castle. Again and again the great guns on the terrace swept down whole companies with grapeshot, while the roar of musketry rang unbroken from roof and windows and bastions. But still the Americans came on without a check, till the foremost were nearly at the foot of the terrace, hewn out of the rocky hill-top on which the palace-fortress stood.

Here a dry moat, too broad to leap, too deep to climb out of, brought them to a halt under the very muzzles of the defenders' guns.

"Scaling-ladders! Bring up the scaling-ladders!" roared the colonel of the Voltigeurs. "Where is that——detail with the scaling-ladders?"

"They dropped the ladders in the grove, sir," reported his adjutant, "because they wanted to get into the fight at the redan. I've sent back to hurry them up. Better take cover, sir," he added, as a Mexican bullet knocked off his own forage-cap.

Dropping behind the boulders that strewed the slope, the Americans fired back as well as they could at the garrison above them. Suddenly, from the rear of the crouching infantry, came the sharp bark of the mountain howitzers. Culver had brought up his little popguns and with them was boldly engaging the heavy artillery of the castle. They tore up the ground around him; he, accurately and without haste, burst cases of canister just above one Mexican gun after another, till the entire battery had been silenced. The howitzers sprayed the whole front of the palace, driving the musketeers from the windows and making the infantrymen on the roof and the terrace crouch down behind the parapets.

As the men with the scaling ladders came up, Culver ordered his mountain battery to cease firing, seized the front end of a ladder about to be dropped by a wounded man, and carried it himself to the edge of the moat. Thrusting it across like a bridge, he ran over on the rounds to the narrow ledge at the foot of the wall, lifted the long heavy ladder as if it had been a fishing-rod, planted it in the moat, and swarmed up. So intent was he on reaching and protecting Malena that he never thought to draw sword or pistol.

As Culver's head rose above the battlements, a Mexican lunged with a bayonet at his throat. Throwing his head to one side, Culver let the musket pass harmlessly over his shoulder, seized the Mexican's extended left arm before it could be withdrawn, dragged him head foremost through the embrasure and hurled him over his back down into the moat below.

Over the parapet and on to the terrace

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Culver sprang, whipping out saber and five-shooter as he came. For ten furious seconds he fought alone, against as many foes as could crowd around him—so many, indeed, that they got in each other's way. Then a gray-coated Voltigeur leapt down beside him, making great play with the butt of a clubbed musket. More Americans followed as other ladders were planted; farther and farther the hard-fighting garrison were driven back from the parapet. Then the Palmetto Regiment and a battalion of regulars came roaring up the long, zigzag ramp built against the southern front, and the terrace was cleared and won.

But the defenders still held the great palace, built by two successive Spanish Viceroys and used by the republic to house its National Military Academy, the West Point of Mexico. Through the barricaded and loopholed windows, the garrison kept up a galling fire on the Americans who now thronged the terrace, and beat vainly with their gun-butts on the massive doors.

Snatching a sponge-staff from the dead hand of a Mexican gunner, Culver thrust it down the muzzle of the piece the man had been serving—a thirty-two-pounder. He found that the gun held a full charge of powder but no ball—the stand of grape still clasped by another dead Mexican artilleryman showed that one of his howitzers had caught this gun-crew in the act of loading.

Ignoring the grape, Culver rammed home a solid shot with his own hands. Under his direction, a score of enthusiastic infantrymen trundled the thirty-two-pounder along the terrace and trained it on the main entrance of the palace, at a nine-yard range. Flashing his pistol at the touch-hole, Culver fired the great gun, and the next instant was barely missed by a flying fragment of the shattered door.

In through the smoking archway poured the American infantry, driving the Mexicans before them from room to room, and floor to floor. Indoors, the musket-shots sounded like artillery, and the ceilings re-echoed the roar of the firing, the clash of steel, the shrieks of the wounded, and the vengeful yell: "Remember the Molino!"

Maddened by the memory of their wounded comrades butchered by the men of this very garrison, the American soldiers fought like raging fiends. Culver and the other officers present did their utmost to restrain them, and give the Mexicans a chance to surrender; but as long as resistance lasted, no quarter was given.

Through the smoke-filled halls of Chapultepec, through the wrecked library and class-rooms of the college, through the long hospital where the terrified patients plucked imploringly at his garments as he sped past, everywhere Culver hunted, seeking for Malena. At last, when he came out on to the broad, flat roof of the palace, he saw her, with a handful of men and boys, holding the highest turret, from which the flag of Mexico still flew.

Bursting in the door of the turret as if it had been cardboard, Culver sprang up the spiral stairs, praying that he might receive her surrender in time to protect her from the unthinking fury of the soldiery now pouring out upon the roof. Then suddenly he heard the firing cease, and a great roar of triumph go up from ten thousand American throats. The fight was over—and Malena still lived!

He saw her, as he reached the top of the turret, standing before him on the parapet by the flagstaff, hauling down the flag with her own hand. Tearing it from the halyards, Malena threw the flag round her like a great cloak and tenderly lifted a fold of the beloved colors to her lips.

In the same moment, she saw Culver. At the sight of his eager eyes, the fierce, exalted rapture of her face melted into an ineffable sublimity of tragic sorrow.

The incarnate spirit of Mexico, suffering, unconquerable, she drew herself up and sprang—not into her lover's outstretched arms but outward, into the empty air.

Divining her purpose, Culver hurled himself forward with a leap that brought his body against the parapet and his arms about her, even as she sprang. For a long and terrible moment, it seemed as if they were falling together to their death on the jagged rocks below. Had the parapet been a hand's-breadth lower, had Culver been less of an athlete, such would have been their end.

The muscles of his outstretched arms cracking under the terrific strain, he held her out over the abyss, then, despite her furious resistance, drew her back to safety. Utterly unaware either of the thousands of spectators or of the battle now raging on the causeways below, he clasped Malena in his arms. Presently she ceased to struggle.

THE END

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Another Cup-Winner

by Roy P. Churchill.

Author of "Hereditary Evidence," "On the Way Back," etc.

"WELL, what do you think of 'em, old-timer?" asked Spike Whitlow, still holding the silver boatswain's whistle with which he had signaled the hoisting of the *Alabama's* race-boat.

Danny Wallace, the grizzled old quartermaster who had stood with Spike and watched the stalwart crew hurry up the gangway to their shower, shook his head slowly.

"Bar none, 'tis the best crew, each man and all together, that this ship has ever had the honor of callin' its own. Look at 'em, Spike, after an hour of work that only Pete McGill knows how to give, and they're as fresh as a hot loaf of soft-tack."

"Well, you old mutt," said Spike, "what're you shakin' that old white head for, and lookin' as solemn as if you'd lost your pipe? This old wagon has turned out some crews, some winnin' crews, some champs, if that bunch of cups in the storeroom means anything, and you've just quit sayin' that this one is the best of the lot. Now what's the matter with you? You're still too darned young to be gettin' cold feet."

Danny Wallace's shrewd wrinkled face relaxed a trifle into a half smile, and, fixing the other with his keen little blue eyes, he said slowly, almost in a whisper, which gave to his words more force than if he had shouted them:

"It's the other bunch, Spike. They're good ones, too, and little Ollie Gannaway is handlin' them as good as our Pete. I don't mind tellin' you, Spike, that the old man's puzzled. I've made the dope on boat-races for nigh on to twenty years, since the day we used to hit 'em up in a service cutter till now in a tissue-paper shell that one man could heave over the side. There's not a weak spot nor a sore spot in either one of these crews. They're as near perfect as their Maker and scientific handlin' can make 'em, and they're both alike, Spike. The way the race stands now it's a draw. We can't win and they can't win."

"How'd you find out so much?" asked the boatswain's mate. "What do you know about their crew?"

"Well," said Danny shrewdly, "I've been pickin' the winner for twenty years now, haven't I? And if a man had lost both hands he could still count the misses on his fingers, and I'm tellin' you that the race stands a draw."

What the old quartermaster didn't tell was of a pair of expensive imported binoculars which he kept locked in his sea-chest, and which brought the other boat's crew as close to him in practise as he wished. With it he could read the expressions on the men's faces a couple of miles away, see their knuckles whiten as they gripped the

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oars, and the drops of spray spread into splashes on their suits.

"Something might happen," offered Spike. "A sprained wrist, overtrained, somebody in the two crews fall off the water-wagon."

Old Danny shook his head sagely.

"Yes," he said, "and we all might die, and the ship might blow up, and the ocean turn to glue, but as she stands it's a draw."

"All right, Danny, we'll let her rock steady at that and I won't breathe it to a soul like you asked me. But keep on searchin', old man, for if you finally do pass out the word for this tie, and somebody wins, the rep you've been makin' for twenty years is spoiled."

THE biggest boat race of the year was barely a week off. The *Alabama* crew and that of her rival, the *Nebraska*, had swept through all opposition for a long series of straight victories, and now the two champions were due to meet in a battle royal. The supremacy of the entire Navy hinged on the result, as well as half a dozen silver cups almost as large as barrels.

The Secretary of the Navy had accepted an invitation to be present and it was rumored that the President himself might come out in the *Mayflower* to see the race.

Every member of both crews was treated like a king aboard his ship. They ate at special mess, of food fit only for thoroughbreds, and swung their hammocks aft in the officers' quarters where the changing watches did not disturb their sleep. Collectively and individually they were the idols of the officers and crew.

"The boys are after me for a report," said Spike to Danny Wallace three days after their first talk. "This bunch on the *Nebraska* is shakin' bunches of money at 'em, and they're coverin' it. But they want the underground, Danny, the word you've been passin' 'em for all those races past. If we're due for a lickin', break it to 'em, or there won't be enough money left in this old packet to buy shoe-strings for a Chinaman."

"Tell 'em, then, Spike," said Danny, "tell 'em it's a draw. No," he interrupted hastily, "tell 'em to wait. They're startin' out to practise now and I'll pass 'em the word when they get in."

"What's all this mystery about?" queried Spike. "You've treed somethin', old man. Go on and tell me about it. Put me next. Can't you trust me?"

"I ain't sure, Spike," said Danny. "I want to see 'em again today, and tomorrow I'll tell you. I trust you, Spike, and I trust the boys, but I don't trust myself."

"All right," said Spike heartily. "Go on and figger your dope," but as he walked off he muttered to himself and shook his head. "He's gettin' old, the old boy is, and leary of his own judgment." Then he turned to the rail to watch the *Alabama* crew start on their morning practise.

As even-timed as the tick of a watch the knifelike oars cut into the water, flashed in the sunlight for a second, and feathered for the return stroke.

"Look at 'em pull!" said the man next him. "They follow Pete's hand like a bunch o' dago musicians. Look at that now!"

Under the master hand of Peter McGill, the boat's crew had changed their stroke from a long swinging forty-to-the-minute stroke, to a breath-taking lightning-like chop which ran sixty strokes to the minute.

The racing-shell tore through the water as if she had been lifted by so many pairs of giant hands and flung forward. Then more slowly the stroke was reduced until the men hung at the oars for every last inch of pull, and straightened their lithe bodies to full length against the tough ash. All this the perfectly trained crew did without a fumble, with the oars evenly spaced, with no sign of hesitancy.

The *Nebraska's* race-boat was practising also, and Danny Wallace, from a sheltered nook on the bridge behind the flag-locker, watched their work through his binoculars. Man by man he watched the expressions on their faces, how they breathed, how each man acted after a spurt. Half the practise through, he turned from them satisfied.

"All perfect but Lem Sprague, the new port stroke," he muttered, "and he's comin' along. Yesterday Ollie had to favor that side a little with the helm, but today it's less. We're a-goin' to have to do some rowin' to beat that bunch."

Taking the glasses down, the old man wiped them carefully with his silk neckerchief, and then turned them on his own ship's crew. In a little while he took them down quickly, slipped them in their worn leather case and put them away. Leaning against the edge of the flag-locker he took off

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his hat and ran a gnarled finger carefully around its already perfectly creased brim. Another wrinkle added itself to those already in his seamed old face, and holding the hat in one hand he ran the other through his thick white hair.

Old Danny had found a flaw, found it in fact the day before, and confirmed it today. Somehow he had to break the news to his shipmates that the *Alabama* must lose, and he hated to do it. The young fellows hung on his word and counted on his judgment, and he had hoped if there was to be a flaw that he would find it in the crew of their rival. Added to Danny's worries was the fact that since he had found the flaw it was his duty to find a cure, and half an hour later, as the *Alabama* boat's crew came on deck from their shower, the old quartermaster beckoned to Randall Scott and led him into a quiet corner.

Randall Scott sat just behind the stroke oar on the starboard side. He had pulled in every boat-race the *Alabama* had ever had, and was a seasoned veteran, up to every trick of the game. Old Danny had known him since his apprenticeship.

"The boys are after me for a forecast," said he. "It's a-goin' to be close, Scotty. How do the fellows feel about it?"

"Nothing to it," said Scotty with affected lightness. "We win."

"It's a-goin' to be close," said old Danny, shaking his head slowly. "This new stroke, now, Sprague. He's comin' on fine. I've been pickin' him for a weak spot, and it's not there, Scotty. Now if there should be a weak spot, in either crew mind ye, that side's a-goin' to lose the race."

As he finished he looked straight at Scott and waited for him to speak. The race-boat man met the old man's gaze steadily for a moment, almost defiantly, looked away and then looked back. Then he spoke.

"What's all this about a weak spot?" he asked. "Maybe you've dug up one among us."

"Maybe I have," said the old man. "Let's talk about it, Scotty boy. What is it now?"

"You mean me?" said the other.

"You," said Danny.

Scotty laughed derisively, yet with a little note of indecision.

"All right," said Danny sadly. "If you're a-goin' to take it thataway—but I'd like to help you. I don't know what it is, and I'm a poor hand at guessin' at other people's business."

"Don't talk up one side and down the other," said Scotty half angrily. "Come out with it plain. What do you mean, anyway?"

The old quartermaster put out his hand and laid it gently on the other's arm.

"Scotty," he said, "you know you're off. It commenced yesterday and it's worse today. There's somethin' wrong underneath. You go through the motions but you've lost the spirit to win. You're not all there. It's a-goin' to take mind and body both to win this race for the *Alabama*."

The big sailor's hand came up and found the old man's, giving it a squeeze which made the older man's fingers ache, but warmed his heart.

"All right, Danny," he said, "I'll tell you. It's only right that you should know anyhow, and it'll help me to do my best."

Then he whispered something in the other's ear and to hide his feelings strode abruptly away. Scott's words set Danny Wallace to pacing the deck and after a time Spike Whitlow joined him.

"What's the answer, old-timer? The boys are waitin'. When I told 'em that you'd promised the dope they knew in a minute that you had uncovered somethin'. Come across with it, old man. They're goin' to follow you like a bunch of sheep."

Fresh from his interview with Randall Scott, Danny hesitated. If he passed the word that the *Nebraska* was to win, it would mean the complete upsetting of Randall Scott. What Scott needed was help and encouragement. If he did not get it, the *Alabama* would lose in all certainty.

"What you waitin' for?" urged Spike.

Then renouncing his cool judgment which for twenty years had never failed to pick a winner, Danny threw careful deductions aside and plunged.

"We win," he said firmly. "I've found a flaw and we win."

The five hundred men of the *Alabama's* crew received Danny's announcement with unbounded enthusiasm. There was something suspiciously uncanny in the way the old quartermaster had picked the winners for so many years, and now that they had his declaration that their boat would win, coupled with the evidence of their own eyes, in the perfection of their crew, they were

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jubilant and happy, and some of their enthusiasm imparted itself to Randall Scott.

The next day Danny met him as he came from practise, and did what he could to help him out.

"It will come out all right, son," he said. "Don't let it get you down again."

BUT the next day Scotty was worse than ever, and this time even Peter McGill noticed it, felt Scotty out for the cause, and, receiving only sullen evasions in reply, he let his man go, like the wise coxswain that he was, thinking that the mood would wear off. Danny Wallace did not need to speak to Scotty to see how things were. As the boy came up the gangway from practise the listless droop of his shoulders told Danny all he wanted to know, and like Pete McGill he let the boy alone.

What Danny Wallace did do, however, was to spread the news afresh that the *Alabama's* crew was sure to win, even against the doleful predictions of Spike Whitlow.

"We're scuttled and the bailin' crew's all drunk," wailed Spike.

"Quit crabbin' and do some boostin' yourself," advised Danny, and Spike took his advice and kept still, even when questioned by his intimates, so that Danny Wallace's report kept the crew of the *Alabama* from suspecting there was any trouble with their boat's crew for two whole days.

Then sober reason asserted itself and they began to notice the frown between Peter McGill's eyes, the longer hours of work, and how at practise he began to drive certain of his men. Randall Scott did not take kindly to the driving. He grew sullen and defiant, and the wiseacres hinted at overtraining and yellow streaks, and wished they had not bet quite so much money on the result.

Through it all Danny Wallace stood firm.

"Tell 'em we win," he told Spike over and over again when he came to him from the crew.

"But why don't you back down, old man?" advised Spike. "This crew of ours is shot full of holes and the biggest hole of all is that Randall Scott you're so chummy with. What's the matter with him, Danny?"

"The boy's all right," said Danny Wallace stoutly. "You fellows are lookin' for faults to pick at and you don't see that the biggest fault of all is criticizin' this boat's crew. The boy is nervous and high-strung, like a thoroughbred horse, and you fellows are naggin' the life out of him with your doubt. You've even got Peter McGill at it."

Peter McGill stopped as he heard his name and came up to the two sailors.

"Got me at what?" he asked.

"I'm glad you butted in," said Danny Wallace. "You, me and Spike here have been havin' a hand in boat-racin' for a long time, and we want to win this big race day after tomorrow, don't we?"

"We do," said the other two fervently.

"Well," said Danny, "let's cut out all the byplays and call things by their right names. Our boat's crew come nigh to bein' perfect a week ago. Now she's gone flat. What's the cause, Pete?"

"I don't like to say, Danny. You and the boy are mighty good friends, and I like you both."

"Play," said the old man disgustedly. "Answer me, Pete, friends or no friends."

"It's Randall Scott," said Pete McGill.

Danny Wallace turned to the other.

"Now you, Spike, what do you say?"

"The same," said Spike. "Everybody in the crew and on the ship knows it. He's off, 'way off."

"All right," said Danny, "I'll make it unanimous. Now then, what're we a-goin' to do about it? You answer, Pete. Suppose you throw him out. Who're you a-goin' to put in the day before the race that'll do as well?"

McGill shook his head.

"Can't be done, Danny."

"Now Spike, let's hear from you, and I don't want any knocks. The captain sprung one the other day about constructive criticism. Now you go on and play that hand."

Spike shook his head.

"You've got us, old man," he said. "It's too late to change him, and with him we lose. The whole blamed crew is unshipped on that one oar."

"Now you two fellows wait," said Danny. "There's a way out. My word's passed that we win, and it stands. Make fast to that one and hang on. The boy needs encouragin', pattin' on the back, heartenin' up, and the stronger we make it the better. Let's get in and do it. Now I'll give you

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another little tip. Bad news travels fast, and that bunch on the *Nebraska* is gettin' all swelled up. Ollie Gannaway is fightin' 'em like fire, tryin' to keep 'em workin, but the whole crew thinks they're a-goin' to win easy, and that's a bad sign for 'em."

"For us, you mean," scoffed Spike, as the conference broke up, but Pete McGill was cheered, and the afternoon's practise was better.

RACE-DAY found the crew of the *Alabama* facing their trial with a dogged determination to do their best, but with almost a hopeless certainty in their hearts that they were to lose the race. The cheering hundreds of their own shipmates who lined the upper works and rail of the *Alabama* as they were towed to the starting-point, only made them a little more desperate. They had none of the thrills of victory. They were out to do a last-ditch fight and lose.

Peter McGill knew the inner workings of the mind of his crew better than they could have expressed it themselves. The attitude of the men made him a little less gloomy himself. He had raced crews before who felt that they were fighting in a corner, and knew that desperation in a man was only a little less hard to beat than an enthusiastic confidence. For this reason he had little to say to his crew, for fear he might spoil their mood.

"Forget about losing," he told them. "We're in this race to row. You fellows know how to pull an oar. When I tell you to pull, *pull!* Give me all you've got, and then some."

The men of the crew made no comment, and made no move except to settle a little more stubbornly in their seats. After a little while, McGill spoke again:

"This bunch on the *Nebraska* are not supermen or wizards, and they've got no more propeller hanging over the stern than we have. Pulling at the oars is going to win this race, and nothing else. Don't forget that. When we get to the starting-point keep your eyes in the boat. When the word comes, pull! I'll do the looking and the talking."

In marked contrast to the *Alabama*, the *Nebraska's* crew arrived at the starting-point smiling and happy, as if the race were already won.

"Where's the funeral?" gibed Ollie Gannaway to his rival, Pete McGill, and the crew of the *Nebraska* laughed derisively.

Pete McGill did not even smile in return.

"We'll show 'em," he muttered so only his crew heard.

In the necessary five minutes for the judges to draw lots for position, Gannaway had to restrain his crew in their excess of exuberance, while the *Alabama's* crew sat grimly and silently in their boat. While the men rested on their oars and Pete McGill's back was turned, Randall Scott reached quickly beneath the thwart on which he sat and pulled out a pair of binoculars. Disregarding the frowns of his comrades, he leveled them toward the home ship. His face was pale and drawn with anxiety.

As he looked, he started, the set lines around his mouth relaxed, and the better to steady the glasses he took his other hand from the oar. It trailed alongside and bumped the boat. Pete McGill turned in a flash.

"Well, of all the boneheads!" he yelped. "What do you think this is, Scotty—shore leave, or a picnic? Get hold of that oar before I rap you with the tiller!"

Scotty did not seem to hear him, and the stroke oar turned around in his seat and pulled the glasses from his eyes.

"The coxs'n is a-talkin' to you, you mutt!" he said disgustedly.

"That'll do," said Pete McGill. "I'll do the bossin' here. Throw the glasses overboard, Scotty, and pick up that oar."

Randall Scott was trained to obey. Almost mechanically he threw overboard Danny Wallace's precious binoculars, rescued the trailing oar, and took his seat. Then he suddenly remembered, and burst out:

"It's all right, boys, it's all right, I tell you! The hole's patched. I'm myself again, and we win."

"Pipe down," bawled Pete McGill, puzzled, and yet a little thrilled by the other's tone.

"It's a cinch," said Randall Scott, "and we all owe it to Danny Wallace. We could win with a deck-bucket trailing."

Peter McGill was at a loss, and so like a wise general said nothing more, while Randall Scott's enthusiasm fired the crew to a pitch of confidence and strength which seemed impossible five minutes before.

The *Nebraska's* crew had witnessed the

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entire incident, and it threw a scare into them.

"Something's happened to that bunch," said Ollie Gannaway. "Begins to look like a boat-race, after all." His words were confident, but there was a shadow of doubt in his tone, and just then the starters signaled the boats to their places.

As a better test of training, the rival boats were to get away with a standing start, and Ollie Gannaway of the *Nebraska* was sorry for this, because his rival, Pete McGill, had an uncanny way of guessing the trigger pull of the starter's pistol, and going a stroke ahead on the start. This faculty of Pete's amounted almost to a superstition among navy race boat-men, and Pete let it go at that, none of his enemies even guessing how he did it.

This race was no exception. His crew watched him almost breathlessly with oars poised, and, as the pistol cracked, even a bare fraction of a second before the sound reached them, McGill's hand came down, the oars cut in, and the boat leaped forward, two feet ahead of its rival.

Against any other coxswain except Ollie Gannaway, the gain would have been a boat's length, for the crack of the pistol had been as an electric shock to him also, and the word "Go!" was formed on his lips and ready in his brain, waiting for the contact. Pete McGill had caught it first because his eyes had been fastened on the air a dozen feet above the pistol, and he had seen the flash before the sound came.

To overcome the inertia of the boats, both crews used the man-killing chop-stroke until they were going at full speed. Then the game was to steady them, slow them down, get into the long, hard swing necessary to last out the three miles of the race.

But Ollie Gannaway was jealous of the two feet that Pete McGill had gained on the start, and, knowing the strength of his crew, kept them at the chop-stroke for a full minute after Pete McGill had slowed down his men. The two feet were gained back, and the two boats shot toward their home ships side by side, while the cheering hundreds in the fighting masts and rigging shouted encouragement.

Under the urge and excitement of the two-foot gain, Ollie Gannaway sought more, but Pete McGill met his play with a sudden quickening of the stroke, and then in an instant the plan of battle for both crews was formed. It was to be a grilling, heartbreaking race, with no relaxation, no breathing spaces, no waiting back to finish strong at the end.

Gannaway's game was to get ahead early in the race and stay ahead, discouraging the wave of enthusiasm that Randall Scott's queer action had brought about, and Pete McGill met speed with speed—when the *Nebraska* spurted, he spurted, and when the stroke was quickened he kept it there.

In this Pete McGill showed his generalship, for Randall Scott's action had brought his crew to that almost impossible knife-edged excellence of training so often sought for, and so seldom reached, when a crew is not ready the day of the race, but is ready the hour, almost the minute of the race. So he drove them cruelly, fearing that if the other boat got two lengths ahead, his crew would lose their spirit, and the race.

Such a race has the danger of a collapse before the end is reached, but, knowing the staying qualities of their men, the two coxswains took the chance and drove them, both afraid of the moral effect of getting behind. The launches which followed, had all they could do to keep up, and, as the boats came nearer the ships, still side by side, the shouts of the ships' crews became savagely incoherent. They were drunk with the joy of battle, of seeing men spend their stored-up strength so extravagantly.

At the end of the second mile the stress of the contest began to show. The stroke lost something of its perfect rhythm and evenness. The men's faces set into straight, haggard lines, and, looking ahead at the distance yet to go, and measuring the strength of his crew, Ollie Gannaway decided to play the race a little safer, to slow down his stroke, and ease up the strain on his crew. At the pace they were going, it was not improbable that both crews would collapse before the finish was reached. So with nearly a mile to go, he decided that the race was still too young to risk the chance of such an accident and he commenced slowly to lengthen his stroke.

Pete McGill had measured the distance also, measured it anxiously, as his crew spent their strength, then their reserve, and now their spirit. But Pete McGill did not believe in changing his plan in the middle of a race, and, with full confidence that he could drive his men across the line, he kept them going with no slackening of speed of

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stroke. His boat shot swiftly ahead. They gained a length, two lengths, while the *Nebraska's* crew rested with their long, even swing. At two lengths ahead they ceased to gain, and Gannaway's crew, pulling steadily, began creeping up, inch by inch.

Here was the supreme test. If Pete McGill could hold his men together and keep them at their stroke, the race was his. But if he relaxed a moment, or had an accident, his rival's long, even stroke would pass him and win the race.

"Drive! Drive!" sang through Pete McGill's brain, and drive he did, his voice rising to a shrill whipping fury as he gave the command, "Stroke!" and lunged forward with each pull of the oars.

"If he can just hold 'em!" shouted Spike Whitlow in Danny Wallace's ear.

The *Alabama's* siren was blowing in short, ear-splitting blasts. The men were yelling like Indians, and from all over the ship they chanted in a wild singsong—

"Hold 'em, hold 'em, hold 'em!"

Danny Wallace wagged his old gray head.

"What a race!" he muttered. "What a race! I'm proud I lived to see it. They will bust every record up to three miles." Then almost in a whisper, so great was his emotion, he joined in the ship's chant, only he said, "Hold 'em, Scotty boy, you must, you must, you must!"

Randall Scott caught the message, for, just at that instant the almost inevitable collapse came, and the second man from the bow, blinded and dizzy from fatigue, his heart pounding in his ears, until he could not hear his coxswain's words, thought the boat was rolling, took a light stroke, missed the water completely, and catapulted his close-cropped bullet head straight into the stomach of the man behind him. Little Shorty Brannon, the bow oarsman, already spent and tired, fighting ahead solely on his grit, gave one gulp and doubled up in agony, letting his oar go.

"Overboard!" barked Pete McGill, and, even in his pain, Shorty heard him and obeyed, rolling over the side clear, between the boat and the oars. He was out of the race with his oar gone, and the finish too near to ship the spare one, and it lightened the boat to have him out. The following launches picked him up, but the *Alabama's* boat was shy a man, and the cheers on the *Nebraska* broke out again with renewed fierceness.

The man who had missed the stroke steadied to work again. The incident had cleared up his mind. With one man gone on Randall Scott's side of the boat, Pete McGill instinctively put his helm over to even the pull with six men on one side and five on the other. Then wonderingly he put it back in the center again. The boat was going evenly, and he looked for the cause. He found it when he looked at Randall Scott, who nodded at him with clenched teeth.

"Go ahead, Scotty," McGill shouted, "we win if you keep it up!"

For Randall Scott, desperately determined to win despite the handicap, was putting enough strength in his oar to make up for Brannon's loss.

"Bend 'em, you bullies! Bear down on 'em!" ordered Pete McGill, but Scotty knew that he spoke to the other members of the crew and not to him.

In that one eye-flash McGill and he had made a compact, he to put the same giant pull in the oar each stroke, and McGill to whip and drive the others to his aid.

There were a dozen ship-lengths to go, and the lead over the *Nebraska* was a scant ten feet. As Scotty took each stroke he wondered where the strength for the next would come from, yet somehow he kept on, one great even pull after another, while behind him the other oars began to waver and chop.

At each stroke the *Nebraska* crept up, her longer and slower pull striking with effective evenness. Here Pete McGill showed his gameness and his generalship. With the rival boat alongside him and with only a few feet to the good he refused to get excited. Very calmly he spoke to Randall Scott.

"Just half a dozen more, Scotty," he said earnestly. And then to the crew:

"They can't win, boys. Steady all now! The race is ours."

This had the effect that he wished, for his crew did not blow up, as they would have had he raved at them. Instead, seeing the *Nebraska* so dangerously near, they put the last ounce of their failing strength into a last spurt, held the lead, and won the race by a bare two feet.

Randall Scott had reached forward for another stroke when McGill spoke to him.

"That'll be all, Scotty," he said gently but exultantly. "The race is ours. And you won it."

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Scotty looked at him blankly a moment, and then tried to toss his oar, and failed. McGill helped him put it aboard.

Neither boat's crew was able to row home to its ship, and, as the launch towed the winning crew to the *Alabama*, Pete McGill made his after-the-race speech.

"You did well, boys," he said. "I want to thank you all, and apologize for driving you. But Randall Scott, the man we had picked on to lose this race for us, won it instead. What was all this play with the glasses, Scotty boy? I'm going to buy you a new set, no matter what they cost."

Randall Scott grinned happily.

"Danny Wallace won this race," he said. "The glasses were his, too. Ask him what was the matter, and tell him I said he could tell."

So saying, he blushed up to the roots of his hair, and was the first man to leap for the gangway when they came alongside.

"Well, Danny," said Pete McGill, "I guess Spike here wants to know too, and after that the whole ship, What did you do to that boy, Randall Scott? He was a dead one until two minutes before the race, and then he came to, and pulled like a wild man. What did you do to him, anyway, and what's been the matter with him?"

Old Danny smiled so that every wrinkle in his face kinked into a curve, and his sharp little blue eyes twinkled.

"The boy's been worried half to death," he said, "and for that matter I have too. The message I sent him was this — I loaned him the glasses so he could get it, if it came."

"Well, what was it?" exploded Spike. "Go on and spring it. Heir to a million, or——"

"Heir to more than a million," said Danny soberly. "Here's the message just like the wireless boy handed it to me. Just in time to win for us. 'Little Randall Scott arrived. All well.'"

"Fine!" chorused Pete and Spike in unison. "But why the suspense and worry?" questioned Spike. "Seems to me it's a lot of fuss over mighty little."

Danny stiffened as if he had been charged with a bayonet.

"Spike Whitlow," he said tensely, "maybe sometime you'll know and understand. I hope you will. It's bad enough at any time, but this case——"

Danny choked and only when Spike and Pete locked arms around his stiff shoulders did he relax and go on.

"Forgive me, boys," he said huskily, "I'm upset, not myself today. Twenty years ago I pulled in a race myself, and when we got in—winners—the news from home—was bad. The little life that came in in place of the one that went out—is my girl—Scotty's wife. Scotty knew about it. He couldn't be with her on account of trainin'. We—we were afraid."

"Forgive me, Danny," pleaded Spike humbly, and Pete McGill wiped his eyes unashamed and passed the handkerchief to Danny.

Danny Wallace found voice first.

"It's all right now," he said. "They're both doin' fine. Scotty's on the way up there."

"The little rascal started in early being a cup-winner," said Pete. "What d'ye say the three of us go ashore and pick him the finest silver cup we can find?"

"You and me'll buy," added Spike. "Gran'dad here'll only be allowed to have it engraved proper."

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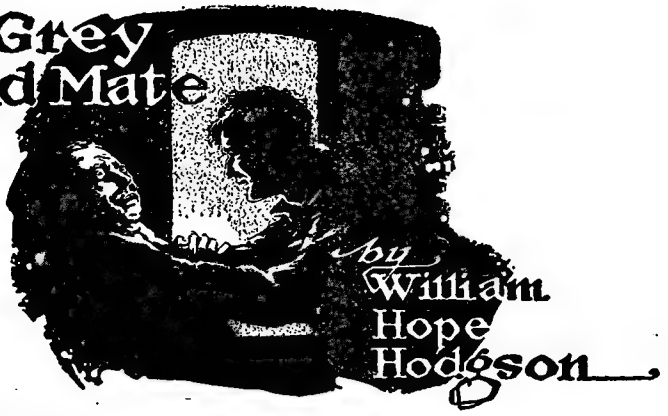
Jack Grey Second Mate



by William Hope Hodgson

Author of "Judge Barclay's Wife," "The Albatross," etc.

SHE stepped aboard from one of the wooden jetties projecting from the old Longside wharf, where the sailing ships used to lie above Telegraph Hill, San Francisco. She rejected almost disdainfully the great hand extended by the second mate to assist her over the gangway.

The big man flushed somewhat under his tan, but otherwise gave no sign that he was aware of the semi-unconscious slight. She, on her part, moved aft daintily to meet the captain's wife, under whose wing she was to make the passage from Frisco to Baltimore.

At first it seemed as if she were to be the only passenger in the big steel bark; but, about half-an hour before sailing, a second appeared on the little jetty, accompanied by several bearers carrying his luggage. These, having dumped their burdens at the outer end of the gangway, were paid and dismissed; after which the passenger, a gross, burly-looking man, apparently between forty and forty-five years of age, made his way aboard.

It was evident that he was no stranger to sea-craft; for without hesitation, he walked aft and down the companionway. In a few minutes he returned to the deck. He glanced ashore to where his luggage remained piled up as he had left it, then went over to where the second mate was standing by the rail across the break of the poop.

"Here, you!" he said bruskly, speaking fair English, but with an unfamiliar accent. "Why don't you get my luggage aboard!"

The second mate turned and glanced down at him from his great height.

"Were you speaking to me?" he asked quietly.

"Certainly I was addressing you, you——"

He stopped and retreated a pace, for there was something in the eyes of the big officer which quieted him.

"If you will go below I'll have your gear brought aboard," the second mate told him.

The tone was polished and courteous, but there was still something in the gray eyes. The passenger glanced uneasily from the eyes to the great, nervous hand lying, gently clenched, upon the rail. Then, without a word, he turned and walked aft.

THE *Carlyle* had been two days at sea, and was running before a fine breeze of wind. On the poop the second mate was walking up and down, smoking meditatively. Occasionally he would go to the break and pass some order to the boatswain, then resume his steady tramp.

Presently, he heard a step on the companion stairs, and, the moment afterward, saw the lady passenger step out on deck. She was very white, and walked somewhat unsteadily, as if she were giddy.

She was followed by the captain's wife, carrying a rug and a couple of cushions. These the good woman proceeded to arrange on the captain's own deck-chair, after which she steadied the girl to a sitting position and wrapped the rug around her knees and feet.

Abruptly, in one of his periodic journeys, as the second mate passed to windward of the place where they were sitting, the voice of the lady passenger reached him. She

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was addressing the captain's wife, but was obviously indifferent whether he heard or not.

"I wish that man would take his horrible pipe somewhere else. The smell of it makes me quite sick!"

He was aware that the captain's wife was trying to signal to him behind the girl's back; but he made no sign that he saw. Instead, he continued his return journey to the break of the poop, with a certain grimness about the corners of his mouth.

Here he proceeded to walk athwartships, instead of fore and aft, so that now he came nowhere near to the girl whose insolent fastidiousness had twice irked him. He continued to smoke; for he was of too big a mind to give way to the smallness of being huffed over the lady's want of manners. He had removed from her presence the cause of her annoyance, and, being of a logical disposition, saw no reason for ceasing to obtain the reasonable enjoyment of his pipe.

As he made his way to and fro across the planks, he proceeded to turn the matter over in his own calm way. Evidently she regarded him—if she thought at all about him—as a kind of upper servant; this being so, it was absurd to suppose that there was an intentional rudeness, beyond such as servants are accustomed to receive in their position of living automata. And here, having occasion to go down on to the main deck to trim sail, he forgot the matter.

When he returned to the poop, the girl was sitting alone; the captain's wife having been called below to attend to her husband who had been ill enough to be confined to his bunk for upward of a week.

As he passed across the planks, he cast occasional glances aft. The girl was certainly winsome, and peculiarly attractive, to such a man as he, in her calm unknowing of his near presence. She was sitting back in the chair, leaning tiredly and staring full of thought out across the sea.

A while passed thus, perhaps the half of an hour, and then came the sound of heavy steps coming up from the saloon. The second mate recognized them for those of the male passenger; yet the girl did not seem to notice them. She did not withdraw her gaze from the sea, but continued to stare, seeming lost in quiet thought.

The man's head appeared out of the companionway, then the clumsy grossness of his trunk and fat under-limbs. He moved toward her, stopping within a couple of yards of her chair.

"And how is Miss Eversley?" the second mate heard him ask.

At his voice, the girl started and turned her head swiftly in his direction.

"You!" That was all she said; but the disgust and the undertone of something akin to fear were not lost upon the second officer.

"You thought—" began the man in tones of attempted banter.

"I thought I had seen the last of you—forever!" she cut in.

"But you see you were mistaken. If the sickness of the sea hadn't claimed you for the last two days, you would have discovered earlier that regret for my absence was wasted."

"Regret!"

"My pretty child——"

"Will you go away! Go away! Go away!" She put out her hands weakly with a gesture of repulsion.

"Come, come! We shall have to see much of one another during the next few weeks. Why——"

She was on her feet, swaying giddily. He took a step forward, as if with an unconscious instinct to bar her passage.

"Let me pass!" she said, with a little gasp.

But he, staring at her with hot eyes, seemed not to have heard her. She put up a hand to her throat, as if wanting air.

"Allow me to assist you below."

It was the deep voice of the second mate. His naturally somewhat grave face gave no indication that he was aware of any tensions.

"I will attend to that," said the male passenger insolently.

But the officer seemed to have no knowledge of his existence. Instead, he guided the lady to the companionway, and then down the stairs to the saloon. There he left her in the charge of the captain's wife, telling the latter that the sea air had proved too much for the young lady.

Returning on deck, he found the passenger standing by the opening of the companion. He had it in his heart to deal with the person in a fashion of his own; but the fellow had taken the measure of the big officer and, though full of repressed rage, took good care to invite no trouble.

On his part, the second mate resumed his

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steady tramp of the deck; but it may be noted that his pipe went out twice, for his thoughts were upon the girl he had helped below. He was pondering the matter of her repulsion for the male passenger. It was evident that they had met elsewhere, probably at the port where the *Carlyle* had picked them up. It was even more evident that the girl had no desire to continue the acquaintance, if it could be named as such.

Upon this, and much more to the same effect, did he meditate. And so, in due time, the first mate came up to his relief.

II

THREE days later, the captain died suddenly, leaving his wife helpless with grief at her loss. By this time, Miss Eversley had gathered strength after her bout with seasickness, and now did her best to comfort the poor woman. Yet the desolate wife would not be comforted, but took to her bunk as soon as her husband had passed into the deep, and there stayed, refusing to be companied by any one. This being so, Miss Eversley was, perforce, left greatly to her own devices, and her own company; for that of Mr. Pathan, the other passenger, she avoided in a most determined manner.

This was by no means an easy matter to accomplish, save by staying in her berth; for did she go upon the poop, the man would, in defiance of all her entreaties or commands, pursue her with his hateful attentions. Yet help was to come; for it happened one day that, the poop being empty save for the man at the wheel, with whom, however, Pathan seemed curiously familiar, the fellow took advantage of the opportunity to try to take her hands. He succeeded in grasping her left, making the remark:

"Don't be so skittish, my pretty. What are your hands, when I am to have the whole of you?" And he laughed mockingly.

For answer, she tried to pull away from him, but without success.

"You see, it's no good fighting against me!"

She glanced round, breathlessly, for help and her gaze fell upon the helmsman, a little, hideous dago who, with an evil grin upon his face, was watching them. At that, she went all hot with shame and anger.

"Let go of my hand!"

"I shall not!"

He reached his left out for her right, but she drew it back; and then, as if with the reflex of the movement, clenched it and struck him full in the mouth.

"Beast!" she said with a little savage note in her voice.

The man staggered a moment; for the blow had been shrewdly delivered, and his surprise almost equaled the pain. Then he came back at her with a rush. The man was no better than some bestial creature at the moment. He seized her about the neck and the waist.

"—— you!" he snarled. "I'll teach——"

But he never finished. A great knuckled hand came between their faces, splaying itself across his forehead. His sweating visage was wrenched from hers. A rough, blue-sleeved arm comforted his neck mightily, tilting his chin heavenward. His grip weakened upon her, then gave abruptly, and she staggered back dizzily against the mizzen rigging.

There came a sound of something falling. It was a very long distance away. She was conscious of the second mate in the immediate foreground, his back turned to her; and beyond him, her gross-featured antagonist huddled limply upon the deck. For a moment neither moved; then the man upon the deck rose shakily, keeping his eye mateward.

The big officer never stirred, and the passenger began backing to get the skylight between him and the second mate. He reached the weather side and paused nervously. Then, and not till then, the officer turned his back upon him, and, without vouchsafing a glance in the direction of the girl, walked forward toward the break of the poop.

As she made to go below, she heard the little steersman mutter something to the defeated man; and he, now that he was in no instant danger of annihilation, raised his voice to a blusterous growl. But the big man?

III

THE fore-hands of the big steel bark *Carlyle* were a new lot who had been signed on in Frisco, in place of the outward-bound crew of Scotch and Welsh sailormen, who had deserted on account of the high pay ruling in Frisco.

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The present crowd was composed chiefly of "Dutchmen," and in each watch, consisting of eight men and a boy, there were only two Americans, one Englishman and a German. The remainder were dagoes and mixed breeds.

The two Americans were in the first mate's watch, the Englishman and the German being with the second's crowd, and the whole lot of them, white, olive and mixed, were about as hard a "rough-house" crew, scraped up from the water-front, as one could find, and acceptable only because of the aforementioned high wages and shortage of men.

And, to complete the number of undesirables aboard, there was Mr. Pathan, the half-breed passenger.

Finally, Mr. Dunn, the first mate, was a nervous little man, totally unfitted to handle anything more than an orderly crew of respectable Scandinavians. The result was that already his own watch had been once so out of hand he had been forced to call upon the second officer to help him maintain authority; since when, automatically, as it were, the second mate had taken, though unofficially, the reins of authority into his own hands.

Thus the situation five days after leaving port, on the homeward passage.

A week had passed.

"If you please, sir, I'd like a word with you."

It was the big boatswain who spoke. He had come half-way up the poop ladder, and his request was put in a low voice, yet with an apparently casual air.

"Certainly, Barton! Come up here if you have anything about which you wish to speak."

"It's about the men, sir. There's something up, an' I can't just put me finger on it."

"How do you mean, something up?"

"Well, sir, they're gettin' a bit at a loose end, an' they're gettin' a bit too free-like with their lip if I tells 'em to do anythin'."

"Well, you know, Barton, I can not help you in that. If you can not keep them in hand without aid, you'll never do it with."

"'Tisn't exactly that, sir. I can handle a crowd right enough along with any man; savin' it be yourself, sir—" with an acknowledging glance at his officer's gigantic proportions—"but there's somethin' in the wind, as is makin' 'em too ikey. It's only since the cap'n went, an' it's my belief as yon passenger's at the bottom of it!"

"Ah!"

"*You* noticed somethin' then, sir?" asked the boatswain quickly.

"Tell me what makes you think the passenger may be in anything that is brewing?" said the second mate, ignoring the man's question.

"Well, for one thing, sir, he's too familiar with the men. An' I've seen him go forrard to the fo'cas'le of a night when 'twas dark. Once I went up to the door on the quiet, thinkin' as I'd get to see what it was as he was up to; but the chap on the look-out spotted me an' started talkin'. I reckoned he meant headin' me off; so I asked him to pass me down the end of me clothes-line, for a bluff, an' then I made tracks."

"But didn't you get any idea of what the fellow was doing in the fo'cas'le?"

"Well, sir, it seemed to me as he was palaverin' to 'em like a father; but as I was sayin' I hadn't time to get the bearin's of what was goin' forrard. Then there's another matter, sir, as——"

"And you might tell the man, while he's up, to take a look at the chafing gear on the fore swifter," interjected the second mate calmly.

The irrelevancy of this remark seemed to bring the boatswain up all standing, as the saying goes. He glanced up at the officer's face, and in so doing the field of his vision included something else—the very one of whom they were talking. He understood now the reason of the second's apparently causeless remark; for that keen-sensed officer had detected the almost cat-like tread approaching them along the poop-deck, and changed the conversation on the instant.

For a couple of minutes the boatswain and the second mate kept up a talk upon certain technical details of ship work, until Mr. Pathan was out of hearing.

"I reckon as he thought he'd like to know what it was we're talkin' about, sir," remarked the boatswain, eying the broad back of the stout passenger.

"What is this other matter that you want to speak to me about?"

"Well, sir, some of the hands 'as got hold of booze somehow. I keeps smellin' of 'em whenever one of 'em comes near me, and I reckon as he—" jerking his head in the

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direction of Mr. Pathan—"is the one as is givin' it to 'em."

The second mate swore quietly.

"What's his game, sir? That's what's foozlin' me. I thinks it's time as you looked inter ther matter!"

"If I thought——"

"Yes, sir?" encouraged the boatswain.

But whatever the second mate thought, he did not put it into words. Instead, he asked the boatswain if he were of the opinion that any of the forecastle crowd were to be depended upon.

"Not one of 'em, sir! There isn't one as wouldn't put a knife inter you if he got half a chanst!"

The second nodded, as if the man's summing-up of the crew were in accordance with his own ideas. Then he spoke.

"Well, Barton, I can not do anything till we know more definitely what is in the wind. You must keep your eyes open and report to me anything that seems likely to help."

Behind them they heard again the pad of Mr. Pathan's deck shoes.

"You had better overhaul the sheaves in those main lower topsail brace blocks," he remarked for the benefit of the listening passenger. "That will do for the present."

"Very good, sir," said the boatswain, and went down the ladder on to the main deck.

IV

IT WAS in the afternoon watch, and Miss Eversley was sitting with a book in her lap, staring thoughtfully out across the sea.

Forward of her, the second mate tramped across the break of the poop. When she had appeared on deck, he had been pacing fore and aft along the poop, but had kept since then to the fore part of the deck.

Of the male passenger there was no sign. Indeed, since the big officer's "handling" of him, he had kept quite away from her, so that at last she was beginning to find her stay aboard not at all unpleasant. Occasionally the girl's glance would stray inboard to the great silent man, smoking and meditating as he paced across the planks.

It was curious (she recognized the fact) how often of late she had found her thoughts dwelling upon him. He was no longer a nonentity—something below the line of her horizon—but a man, and a man in whom she was beginning to be interested. She remembered now—what at the time she had scarcely noticed—her casual ignoring of his proffered aid as she stepped aboard. It had seemed nothing then to her, no more than if she had casually rejected the aid of a footman; but now she could not comprehend how she had done it.

From this her memory led her to that distinctly-to-be-regretted remark about his smoking. She watched him, and realized the more completely as she did so that she would be vitally afraid to do such a thing again; for, all unaware to herself, the manhood of the man was mastering her. Yet, at this time, she had no realization of the fact; nothing beyond that she was interested in him, perhaps somewhat afraid and certainly a little desirous of knowing him.

On the second mate's part, he was thinking of other things than her. The preceding day he had been obliged to step down on the main deck to exert authority, and had succeeded only by laying out a couple of the crew. That the disaffection was due, in part at least, to Mr. Pathan he had very little doubt; but no proof that would justify him in putting the man in irons, as he had determined to do the very moment such was forthcoming. Also, he knew that the captain's death had unsettled them, and that there were vague ideas among them that now they were under no compulsion to obey orders. It was doubtless, along these lines that Pathan was working with them, and the thought made the big officer grit his teeth.

"*Look out, Mr. Grey!*"

The words came shrill and sudden in the voice of Miss Eversley, and the second officer turned sharply from where he had stopped a moment to lean upon the rail. He saw that she was on her feet, her arm extended toward him, while her gaze flickered between him and aloft. In the same instant, there was a sort of sogging thud behind him.

His stare had followed the girl's, and for an instant he had seen the dark face of one of the crew over the belly of the mizzen topsail; then he had twisted quickly to see the reason of that noise, though already half comprehending the cause. In that portion of the rail over which he had just been leaning was stuck a heavy steel marlinspike, the sharp point thereof appearing below, for it had penetrated right through the thick teak.

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For a moment he looked at it, while his face grew quietly grim. Then he turned and walked toward the mizzen rigging. From here he could look up abaft the mast. Thus he saw the man who had dropped the spike making his way rapidly from aloft.

Getting into the lower rigging, the man—who proved to be one of those the second mate had floored the previous day—called out in broken English his regret for the accident; but the officer, knowing how little of an accident there had been about the affair, said nothing. Then, as soon as the creature put foot on the deck, he caught him by the nape of the neck and walked him forward to where the spike stood up in the rail.

Below on the main deck stood several of the crew, watching what would happen, and fully prepared to make trouble if they got the half of a chance. They saw the second officer grasp the embedded spike with one great hand, then with apparent ease bend it from side to side till it broke, leaving in the rail that portion which had penetrated.

Immediately afterward, quite coolly, and calculating the force of the blow, he struck the man with it upon the side of the head, so that he went limp in his grasp; then he laid him down gently on the hen-coop and bade a couple of them come up and carry him to his bunk. And this, being thoroughly cowed, as was the second mate's intention, they did without so much as a murmur.

As soon as the men were gone with their burden, he walked aft to where the girl stood.

"Thank you, Miss Eversley," he said simply. "I should have been spitted like a frog if you had not called."

She made no pretense of replying, and he looked at her more particularly. She was extraordinarily pale, and staring at him out of frightened eyes. He noticed also that she held to the edge of the skylight as if for support.

"You are not well?" he said, and made as if to support her.

But she warded him off with a gesture.

"What a brute you are!" she said in a voice that would have been cold had it been less intense.

He looked at her a moment before he replied, as if weighing the use of speech.

"You don't understand," he remarked at last, calmly. "We have a rough crowd to handle, and half measures would be worse than useless. Won't you sit down?" And he indicated the chair behind her.

"It—it was butchery!" she remarked with a sort of cold anger, and ignoring his suggestion.

"Very nearly—if you hadn't called." There had come a suggestion of humor about the corners of his mouth.

"I——"

She groped backward vaguely for the chair, and seemed unconscious that it was his hands which guided her there.

"Now, see here, Miss Eversley. You must really allow me to be the better judge in a matter of this sort. I can not afford to sign for the long trip, if only for your sake."

"For my sake!" Her voice sounded scornful. "In what way does it concern me?"

The grimness crept back into his face and chased away the scarcely perceptible humor.

"In this way," he replied in a voice as nearly as cold as her own but for a certain almost savage intensity. "I, and I alone, am keeping matters quiet aboard here; for I may as well tell you at once that the first mate does not count for that much—" and he snapped his finger and thumb—"among the crowd we've got in this packet. They're quiet at present only because they're afraid of me."

"What do you mean?" She asked the question with a brave assumption of indifference, to which her frightened eyes gave no support. "How does it matter to me whether your men are quiet or not?"

He looked at her a moment quietly and with something in the expression of his face that would have been contempt had it not been tempered by a deeper emotion.

"Listen!" he said, and she quailed before his masterfulness. "If that spike had done its work just now, you had been better dead than here. Do you think——"

He did not finish but turned from her and walked forward along the deck, leaving her gazing at the nakedness of a hideous possibility.

V

A WEEK passed in quietness, and, though the second mate and the boatswain between them had kept a strict watch upon the male passenger's movements, there had been nothing that

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could be looked upon with suspicion; for they had no knowledge of the tightly folded notes flipped to the helmsman, and by him conveyed forward, and read for the delectation of the mutinous crowd in the forecastle.

It was extraordinary that Pathan should discontinue so abruptly his nocturnal visits to the men. Possibly he had caught a stray word or two of the boatswain's confabulation with the second mate, and so taken fright. Whatever it was, the fact remained that it was impossible to come upon anything which would justify their putting him out of the way of doing mischief. Even the boatswain's complaints about the men's behavior seemed to be lacking foundation during this time, and altogether the ship appeared to be quieting down nicely.

Though there had seemed of late little need for anticipating trouble, yet the second mate had his doubts but that there was something under this apparent calm, and, having his doubts, took the precaution to carry a companionable weapon in his side pocket.

In the end, events proved that he was right; for, one afternoon on watch, the boatswain, chancing to have physical trouble with one of the men, the rest of the watch closed in upon him in a mob. At that the second mate went down to take a turn, which turn he took to such a tune that he had three of them stretched out before they were well aware that he was among them. They were beginning to give before his onslaught when suddenly he heard Pathan's voice, away aft, singing out:

"Get on to him, lads! Now's your time! Give the bully a taste of his own sort!"

At that the rest of them turned upon him with a rush, leaving the sadly mauled boatswain to himself. And now the second mate showed of what he was made. They were clinging on to him like a lot of weasels—gripping his legs to trip him, grasping at his hands and arms, and climbing on his back. One of these latter having clasped hands under his chin, was doing his utmost to throttle him.

This the second mate foiled by unclasping the fellow's dirty paws and pulling him bodily over his head, bringing him, with a continuation of the movement, crashing down upon those of his attackers immediately in front. At the same instant, the boatswain, being by now somewhat recovered, laid hold upon one of those in the rear and hauled him off. Even as he did so, there came the sound of a pistol shot.

The second mate hove himself round carrying the mass of clinging men with him. He saw Pathan coming along the decks toward them at a run. In his hand was a pistol, with the smoke still rising from it. Upon the deck lay the boatswain. He was kicking and twitching; for it was he whom the passenger had shot.

"You——skunk!" roared the second mate. He caught two of his attackers by the hair of their heads and beat their skulls together so they became immediately senseless.

He saw Pathan halt within a dozen feet of him and aim straight at his head. He had been dead the following instant, but that there happened a diversion.

A white face flashed into the field of his vision, and the next moment Miss Eversley had thrown a handful of some whitish powder into the man's face. The pistol dropped with a thud, and from Pathan there was nothing save a mixture of gasps and shouts, violent sneezing, and coughs that broke off oddly into breathless blasphemy.

The second mate shouted incoherently. Then the girl was upon his assailants, throwing handfuls of the powder into their faces; whereupon they loosed him, as if their strength had gone from them, and fell to much the same antics as had Pathan. Some of the powder rose and assailed the second officer's nostrils, so that he sneezed violently. It was pepper!

He turned to the girl. At her feet lay the tin with which she had wrought his relief. She herself was standing, crying and sneezing along with the rest, and trying to wipe her eyes with a peppery handkerchief.

The second mate's glance noted the pistol dropped by Pathan, and he stepped over, and, picking it up, put it in his pocket. Between him and the group of sneezing, choking men lay the body of the boatswain. A lot of the pepper had been spilt upon his upturned face, yet he moved no whit. He was quite dead.

"What's happened, Mr. Grey?" asked a thin voice at his elbow.

"Rank mutiny!" he replied.

"Whatever shall we do?" returned the voice, the owner of which was the first mate. "Whatever shall we do?"

"Nothing," said the second mate shortly.

He turned from the mate and bellowed to

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the other watch who were coming aft in a body, having been aroused by the noise.

"Now then, my lads! Up forrard with you! Smartly!" And he pulled out his revolver.

They went backward with a surge as he covered them.

"Back into the fo'cas'le! Don't stir out till I tell you!"

The threatening weapon, backed by the determination of the man, overawed them and they went quickly.

"Close that door!" he roared.

It was closed immediately. Then he turned his attention to those around. Miss Eversley was standing near, her cheeks white, but her eyes and nose very red. It was plain to him that she was all of a tremble and like to fall, so that, without more ado, he took her by the shoulders and led her to a seat upon a spar lashed along by the bulwarks.

"Now, don't faint," he commanded.

"I'm not going to," she said soberly.

He left her hurriedly; for the men, having recovered from the effects of the pepper, were gathered in a clump and eying him doubtfully. To the right, Pathan had got upon his feet. It is just possible that in another moment they would have been upon him, which would have meant the loosing of the other watch, had he not acted with decision.

"Cyrone and Andy," he shouted, facing them squarely, "aft with you, and tell the steward to pass out the irons!"

At the word, Andy started aft to obey. But Cyrone, one of those who had been foremost in the trouble, made no move.

"Cyrone!" said the second mate.

The man had done well to understand the dangerous quiet in his tone; but he did not. Instead, with unbounded insolence, he turned to the fellows surrounding him.

"Who for the irons, hey? They for we! I know! I know!" he shouted excitedly, and broke off into an unintelligible jargon of words.

"Cyrone!"

"For to——you go!" shouted the wretch in reply. It was evident that he was depending on the others to back him up.

The second mate said no word, but raised his pistol. The men about Cyrone scattered to each side. They had seen the second mate's eyes. In that last moment the fellow himself must have come suddenly into knowledge; for he started back, crying out something in an altered tone.

There was a scream from Miss Eversley, which blent with the sudden crack of the weapon; then Cyrone staggered and fell sideways on to the hatch. There was an instant of strange silence, broken by a dullish thud on the deck behind.

"Jardkenoff, go along with Andy for those irons," said the second mate in a level tone.

At his order the whole of them had started forward like frightened animals.

Jardkenoff ran past him, crying "Yi, yi, sir!" in a shaking voice.

While they were gone for the irons, the second mate bade the others lift the bodies of the boatswain and Cyrone on to the hatch. Then he looked round to discover the cause of that thud upon the deck. He saw that Miss Eversley had fallen forward off the spar on to her face, and at that he hastened to lift her. Fortunately, she had escaped injury, at which unconsciously he sighed relief. Then, taking her into his arms, he carried her to the hatch, singing out to one of the men by name to run aft to bring the steward with some brandy.

All this while, Pathan, the passenger, had stood in a dazed fashion beside the mainmast. Now, thinking he perceived a chance to steal aft to the temporary safety of his room, he began to sidle quietly away. It was no use, for the mate's voice pulled him up short before he had gone a dozen feet.

"You will stay where you are, Mr. Pathan!" was all that he said.

When the irons came, the steward accompanied them, carrying a glass full of brandy. This, under the eye of the second mate, he proceeded to administer. At the same time, the officer was superintending the ironing of Pathan. By the time that this was accomplished, Miss Eversley had begun to come to a knowledge of her surroundings, and presently sat up. Before this, however, the second mate had seen to it that Pathan was removed to the lazarette, for he would not have her upset further by sight of the murderer.

As soon as she was strong enough, he gave her his arm and led her aft to her cabin. In the saloon they came upon the captain's wife sitting limply in one of the chairs. At their entrance, she started up, and cried out something in a frightened voice. The poor woman seemed demented and quite

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incapable of rational speech. It was evident that the scene on deck—which apparently she had witnessed—had, in conjunction with her recent loss, temporarily unsettled her mental balance.

With difficulty they persuaded her to go to her room, after which the second mate returned to the deck, with the intention of trying to put a little heart into the nonentity whom Fate had placed above him in the scale of authority.

That evening, in the second dog-watch, the body of Cyrone was, by his orders, ignominiously dumped over the side without ceremony, and with a piece of rope and holystone attached to his feet.

VI

THE following day it was a somewhat cowed lot of men who came aft, at the second mate's bidding, to the funeral of the boatswain. Nor did his opinion of them, expressed tersely after the body had gone down into the darkness, help to reassure them. He told them that, at the first sign of further insubordination, he would shoot them down like the dogs they were; that, in future, there should be no afternoon watch below, and that work should be continued right through the two dog-watches. On learning this, there came a slight murmur, expressive of discontent checked by fear, from the men grouped below the break.

"Silence!" roared the second officer, and whipped out a pistol from his side pocket.

Instantly the murmur ceased; for the men, as was the second's intention, realized that he would stop nowhere to enforce his commands. And there was still vividly in their minds the execution of Cyrone.

As the men went forward, the first mate ventured a weak protest against the second's measures.

"You'll have 'em murdering us, Mr. Grey, if you go on like that! Why don't you speak to 'em nicely?"

The second mate looked down upon his superior. At first his glance denoted impatient contempt; but after the first moment an expression of tolerance spread over his features as he took in the other's almost pathetic weakness of face and figure.

"I believe you read the Bible, Mr. Dunn?"

"I—I—" began the mate, flushing slightly "Yes—perhaps I do sometimes. Why?"

"Well, you should know how little use swine have for pearls."

"You think, then, Mr. Grey——"

"I'm certain. That scum would take kindness for a sign of weakening on our part, and then——"

He made an expressive gesture.

"I wish to God we were home!" said the mate fervently.

"You cheer up, mister!" replied the big officer. "If you have any trouble with your lot, don't stop to talk—shoot!"

"It's an awful thing to take a life."

"It is a necessary thing sometimes. And, besides, you have only to bang on the deck for me, and I'll be up in a brace of shakes."

And so, after a few more words of encouragement to the frightened man, the second left him in charge, and went below for a sleep.

True to his word, the second mate kept the mutinous crowd of sailormen hard at it from dawn to dusk. Even the first mate, inspired by his example and encouragement, made a brave attempt to follow in his wake. As the second mate put it, "Sweat the flesh off their bones, and they'll be too tired to use their dirty brains." Also, he was the more confident of keeping them in subjection, now that Pathan was safely ironed in the lazarette.

Thus, at last, matters seemed in a fair way to tend to a happy ending of the troubles that had beset them so far. Yet of one person this could not be said; for the mental condition of the captain's wife showed no signs of improvement. Fortunately, she was in no way violent and gave little trouble, her state being that of one suffering from melancholia in one of its quieter forms.

Then one morning it was discovered she was missing. A search was made through the ship, but without success. She was never found. Evidently the poor creature had crept on deck some time during the night and gone overboard.

From this, onward, nothing disturbed the monotony of the voyage for many days. The second mate kept the crew well in hand, in no way abating rigorous treatment of them, so that did he but raise a hand they jumped to do his bidding.

And now of Miss Eversley. Day by day the girl had found her thought centering upon the second mate. The horizon of

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her mind seemed bounded by him. She caught herself watching his least gesture as he paced the poop in his meditative fashion, or gave some order to the crew. Did the first mate relieve him, so that he could go below for a sleep, the deck seemed strangely empty, the wind chilly, the sea dull and uninteresting. Yet when he relieved the first mate, how different! Then the wind was warm, the sea full of an everlasting beauty, the deck, nay, the very planks of the deck, companionable.

And so she grew into the knowledge that she loved him, even to the extent of looking forward to her future life as a hideous blank, if he were not to share it; while he—silly man! He would break off his walks to sit and chat with her; but of that which she most desired to hear, not a word. Yet, by his eyes, she guessed that he cared; but for some reason—possibly because she was so much alone—he said nothing.

And so, at last, she might have come to aid him in spanning the gulf that remained yet between them; but that fate, in its own terrible way, took a hand.

VII

"MR. GREY! Mr. Grey! Jack! Jack!"

The second mate woke with a start and leapt up in his bunk.

Miss Eversley was standing in the doorway of his berth.

"Quick! They've killed the first mate! And they're coming down—now! Pathan has been let out, and he's with them!"

Even before she had made an end of speaking, the second mate had reached the floor with a bound. He snatched the revolver from under his pillow, and ran into the saloon.

From the doorway, giving into the companion stairs came the sounds of whispering, and the padding of many bare feet descending. He made a quick step to meet them; but the girl caught his arm.

"Don't, Jack! Don't!" Then, as he still hesitated: "For my sake—remember! Oh! Is there no place?"

She stopped, for the second mate had caught her by the arm and was running her toward the fore part of the saloon. His wits, slightly bewildered by sleep, had flashed instantly to their normal clearness under the stress of her terror. He realized that, for her sake alone, he had no right to throw away his chances of life.

Just as the foremost of the mutineers stepped silently into the dimly lighted saloon, the big officer pushed open the door of the foremost berth on the port side and thrust Miss Eversley in. At the same moment, the man at the other end discovered them and gave a yell to announce the fact.

The following instant he lay dead, and the man behind him shared the same end. This caused a temporary hesitation on the part of the attackers, and in that slight interval the second officer slipped into the berth after the girl, slammed the door, and locked it.

"Stand to one side," he whispered to her,

As she did so, he hurled himself at the forward bulkhead of the berth. One of the boards started, and he attacked it again, the noise he was making drowning that of the mutineers in the saloon.

Crash! The momentum of his effort had made a great breach in the woodwork and taken him clean through into the absolute darkness of the sail-locker beyond.

In a moment he was back. He caught the girl by the wrist and helped her through. Even as he did so there came a loud report in the saloon, and a bullet stripped off a long splinter on the inner side of the door as it came through.

Immediately, the second officer raised his weapon, and fired—once—twice. At the second shot there came a sharp outcry from one of those beyond the door, and then three shots in quick reply. They hurt no one, for the big officer had bounded into the sail-locker. He had dropped his emptied weapon into his side pocket and was helping Miss Eversley over the great masses of stowed sails.

In the half of a minute he whispered to her to stand. An instant he fumbled, and and she heard the rattle of a key. Then a square of pale light came in the darkness ahead of her, and she saw that he had opened a trap in the steel bulkhead that ran across the poop.

The following instant she was in darkness; for the huge bulk of her companion completely filled the aperture as he forced himself through. The light came again, and then she saw his head silhouetted against it in the opening.

"Give me your hand," he whispered, and the moment afterward she was standing

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beside him on the deck, under the break of the poop.

For an instant they stood there, scanning the decks, but every soul, saving the helmsman, had joined in the attack. Through the opening behind them came the sound of blows struck upon the door of the berth which they had just quitted. No time was to be lost; for the moment that the brutes discovered that rent in the woodwork of the berth, they would be after them.

A sudden idea came to the second officer. He shut down the door of the vertical trap and locked it. The men would search the sail-locker for them, now that it was shut and fastened; while, if he had left it open, they would have been on their track immediately.

"Forrard to the half-deck," he muttered, and they ran out into the moonlight.

Now the half-deck was a little, strongly built steel deck-house, situated about amidships. It had one steel door on the after end, and once they were in, and this shut, they would be comparatively safe, at least for the time being.

Abruptly, as they ran, there came a muffled outcry, and they knew that the door to the berth had been broken down. They reached the half-deck, and, while Miss Eversley sprang over the washboard, the officer ran to slip the hood which held the door back. Even as he reached up his hand there came a shout from the poop. They were discovered.

There came a thudding of rapid feet, and he saw the whole remaining crew of the boat tumbling hurriedly down the ladder on to the main deck. At that critical instant he found that the hook was jammed. He riddled at it a moment; but still it refused to come out of its eye.

The running men were half-way to him, howling like wild beasts, and brandishing knives and belaying-pins. In desperation he caught the edge of the door, put one foot against the side of the house, and tugged. An instant of abominable suspense; then the hook gave, parting with a sharp crack. Through the very supremeness of his effort, he staggered back a couple of paces, then, before he could regain the door to shut it, a couple of the men who had outstripped the others, leaped past him and into the half-deck, with a cry of triumph.

He heard Miss Eversley scream; then a third man was upon him. The second mate tried to slam the door in his face, but the fellow jammed himself in between the door and the side of the doorway. At that the big officer caught him by the chin and the back of the head, and plucked him into the half-deck by sheer strength. Then he brought the door to, and slipped the bolt, just as the rest of the men outside hurled themselves against it.

From the girl there came a cry of warning, and, in the same instant, the loud clang of some heavy missile striking the door by his right ear. He whirled round just in time to receive the united charge of the three he had imprisoned with himself in the deck-house.

Fortunately there was a sufficiency of light in the berth; for the lamp had been left burning by the former occupants when they left to join in the attack on the afterguard.

Two of the men had their knives. The third stooped and made a grab for the iron belaying-pin which he had just thrown at the officer. Him the second mate made harmless by a kick in the face; then the other two were upon him.

He snatched at the knife-hand of the man to the right, and got him by the wrist; tried to do the same to the other and missed. The fellow dodged, rushed in and slashed the second mate's shirt open from the armpit to the waist, inflicting a long gash, but the next instant was hurled across the berth by a terrific left-hand blow.

The second mate turned upon the man whose wrist he had captured. His fingers were hurting intolerably, for the fellow was tearing at them with the nails of his loose hand so that they were bleeding in several places. He caught the wretch by the head, jammed the left arm under his chin, and leaned forward with a vast effort. There was a horrid crack, and the man shuddered and collapsed.

There came a little broken gasp of horror from the girl who was crouched up against the corner on the starboard side. The second mate turned upon her.

"Turn your face to the bulkhead, and stop your ears," he commanded.

She shivered and obeyed, trembling and striving to stifle back a tumult of sobbing which had taken her.

The officer stooped and removed the knife from the hand of the dead man. Upon the door behind him there sounded a perfect

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thunder of blows. Abruptly, as he stood up the glass of the port on the starboard side was shattered, and a hand and arm came into the light.

The second mate dodged below the line of the bunkboard. There was a loud report, and a bullet struck somewhere against the ironwork. He ran close up to the bunk, still keeping out of sight, then rose upright with a sudden movement and grasped the pistol and the hand that held it, leaned forward over the bunk, and struck with his knife a little below the arm. There came a howl of pain from outside and the body fell away from the port, leaving the loaded pistol in the second mate's grasp.

Not a moment did he waste, but slammed to the iron cover over the port and commenced to screw up the fastening. It was stiff, so that he had to take both hands to it, and because of this he placed the revolver down upon the bedding of the bunk.

This came near to causing his death, for, suddenly, as he wrestled with the screw, a hand flashed over his shoulder and grabbed the weapon. Instinctively the second mate dodged and swung up a defending arm. He struck something. There was a sharp explosion close to his head, and then the clatter of the falling weapon.

By this he had got himself about and saw that the two whom he had temporarily disabled were upon him. Before he could defend himself, one of them struck him with the iron belaying-pin across his head. It sent him staggering across the floor.

As he fell, a scream from Miss Eversley pierced to his dull senses, and he got upon his knees, gasping and rocking, yet still full of the implacable determination to fight. For all his grit he would have been dead but for the girl. He had grasped the legs of one of his assailants; but was too dazed and weakened to put forth his usual strength.

The second man raised the heavy pin for another smite, but it never fell. To the second mate, wrestling pointlessly, there sounded a dull thud and a cry. Something fell upon him all of a heap, as it were, and he was brought to the deck upon his side; yet he had not relaxed his somewhat nervous grip upon the man's legs, so that the fellow came down with him.

For perhaps the half of a minute he held on stupidly while the man struggled violently to get away. Then, almost abruptly, nerve and reasoning-power came back to him, and in the same instant a violent pain smote him between the left shoulder and the neck. He got upon his knees, hurling the dead body of the other man from off his shoulders with the movement.

He was now above his opponent, and at once attempted to capture the fellow's knife. In this he was not at first successful, with the result that he sustained a second stab, this time slitting open the front of his shirt, and cutting his breast. At that, growing inconceivably furious, he regarded not the knife, but smote the man with his bare fist between the eyes and again below the ear, and so shrewd and mighty were the blows that the fellow died immediately.

Perceiving that the man was indeed dead, the second mate got himself upon his feet. He was breathing deeply, and his head seemed full of a dull ache.

He took his gaze from the bodies at his feet, and glanced around. Not two yards distant stood Miss Eversley. She had a revolver in her right hand. At that, the second mate understood how he had escaped with his life. Yet he had no thought of thanking her; for the horror in her face warned him not to do anything that might increase her realization of what she had done. Instead, he made two steps to her, and took her in his arms.

With the feel of his arms about her, she dropped the pistol and broke into violent weeping. And he, having some smattering of wisdom, held his peace for a space.

Presently the extreme agitation of the girl passed off, and she sobbed only at intervals. Later still she spoke.

"I shall never be happy again."

And still the second mate preserved the sweet wisdom of silence.

"Never, never, never!" he heard her whispering to herself.

And so, in a while, she calmed down to quiet breathing. For a space they stood thus, and on the decks all about the little house was silence, save for the occasional pad, pad, of a bare foot, as those without moved hither and thither.

VIII

THE day had come and passed, and it was again night.

Within the house things could be seen but dimly, for the lamp was turned no more than a quarter up, and of oil they had

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no supply beyond the quantity within the lamp itself. Fortunately, there was no immediate need to worry about water; for the water breaker, lashed to the port end of the table, was a quarter full, owing to the boatswain's and carpenter's dislike for soap and water.

As for food, an examination of the bread barge in one of the empty lower bunks showed him that there was enough biscuit to keep the two of them crudely fed for some days, provided they were careful. In the food cupboard there was also half a bottle of ship's vinegar, about half a pound of ship salt pork, some sugar in a soup-and-bully tin, and about three pounds of black molasses in a big seven-pound pickle jar; all of these being the usual savings of rations that might be found in the food locker of any other lime-juicer, windjammer in all the seven seas.

He had, aided by the girl, bound up his wounds, which were not sufficiently serious to trouble him with anything more than a constant smarting; and though he had bled a good deal, he was so full of life and vitality that he was scarcely aware of the loss, except that he was abnormally thirsty; which fortunately the water in the breaker enabled him to quench freely. Yet, all the same he held this need somewhat in check, for they must never run short of the precious fluid.

During the day a certain amount of light had driven in between the crevices about the door. Beyond this there had been none, for the ports were all protected by their iron covers. Fortunately, as the second mate had discovered, all of them had been fastened on the preceding night, previous to their making a refuge of the house, all, that is, save the one through which they had been attacked. To this fortunate happening it is probable they owed their lives.

In the corner of the house to the right of the door there was a grim mound. The second mate had spread a couple of blankets over it to hide its full horror from the eyes of the girl; yet, by this very act, he had made it almost more unbearable than if he had left them in all the stark awesomeness of uncovered death.

Out upon the decks was quietness. Indeed, all through the day there had been but one attempt to molest them, and this the second mate had foiled by quietly opening one of the after ports and firing into the thick of the attacking party. In this way he was persuaded that he could have held the house for as long as it pleased him to do so but for the insurmountable obstacle that confronted him in the shape of lack of ammunition. Yet, even as it was, it was plain to him that the repulse he had given them was likely to keep them at a respectable distance—at least for some while. For, out of a crew of sixteen deck-hands, six had already been killed and several wounded.

In the brief time he had been at the port he had gathered something of the methods they had been about to apply to the felling of the door. They had rigged up a spar on a tackle, so as to form a rough sort of battering ram; yet, in the brief attempt that he had permitted them, the machine had proved unsuccessful, for the suspending rope had been too long, and the rolling of the ship had caused the spar to swing across the after end of the house, in the fashion of a clock pendulum, so that at one moment the business end of the ram was opposed to the door, and another to some portion of the end of the house.

In spite of the failure of the attackers, the big officer was well aware that with a more perfect appliance, and no ammunition with which to beat them off, they would not be long in forcing the door. And then. . . .

The second night of the imprisonment had come. The second mate had gone to the door and was listening; but beyond the pad of a bare foot, or hum of hoarse voices, there was nothing to tell of the watchers about the decks.

For her part, the girl was busying herself clearing away the few eatables from which they had been making a meal. This done, she hesitated a moment, then went over to the second mate.

"Let me stay up tonight and watch, Jack. You have not had any sleep, and I have slept most of the day. I could wake you up the moment anything happened."

The big man put a hand on each side of her shoulders and looked down upon her with a grave half-smile.

"Do, Jack! You can trust me," she urged.

"Trust you, little girl," he replied. "Yes, child, with a thousand lives if I had them."

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"Then you will let me stay up and watch?'

He shook his head slowly.

"There will be no need tonight, at any rate. They can not get at us without noise. We may both sleep."

This he said to quiet her entreaties; for he had no intention to allow her to sit alone in the darkness with her thoughts, and that blanket-covered mound, while he slept. More, he wished her to sleep; for he had a project which he hoped to carry out during the hours of darkness.

For a moment she stood looking up at him in the half-light. Then she slipped her hands on to his shoulders.

"Then I will say good night, Jack, for we must save the oil in the lamp."

The second mate stooped and kissed her.

"Good night, Mary," he said gravely.

"Good night," she whispered, kissing him in return.

Then she left him and went behind the blanket which he had rigged up before the bunks on the starboard side.

A space of about two hours passed, during which the second mate lay awake listening. Presently, realizing that the girl was asleep, he got up and quietly opened the door of the house. He listened a minute and found no one about, then swiftly he carried out each of the dead bodies on to the deck and left them there. He returned to the house and locked the door.

All at once, from outside the door, there rose an outcry. At that, he knew that the dead had been discovered. The outcries sank to a subdued murmur; for there had come fear among the men. Yet from thence onward, the door was never left unguarded day or night.

IX

THE morning of the fourth day of their imprisonment dawned, and the second mate was awakened by a noise of hammering close against the port on the left side of the door. He jumped from his bunk quietly, and crept softly to the one on his right. He had the revolver in his hand.

Very cautiously he unscrewed the fastening of the iron cover, and glanced out, but could see no one. For a little he listened, and between the blows he caught a murmur of talk some little distance away. Abruptly he recognized Pathan's voice. At that, quickly but silently, he unscrewed the fastening of the glass and opened it. He thrust his head out and looked to the left.

Close to him, and right in front of the door, stood one of the men. He held the muzzle of a clumsy ship's musket, the butt resting on the deck. The second mate remembered having observed this same antique weapon hanging in the steward's pantry. It was evident that they were but poorly supplied with firearms.

Beyond the guard, he made out a couple more of the men fixing a heavy piece of timber across the other port. Evidently they had hit upon this plan of preventing his interfering with their operations. With the two after ports blocked they could do much as they pleased.

Suddenly a sharp exclamation on his right startled the second officer. He glanced round. There was Pathan fumbling with his revolver.

Instantly the second mate snatched his head into the shelter of the house. Almost at the same moment there sounded a thunderous bang, close to the left. He heard Pathan give a scream of pain, breaking off into a blatter of cursing.

At the risk of his life he shoved his head out. Pathan was nursing his right hand, while big tears of pain were running down his cheeks to that strange accompaniment of blasphemy. On the deck, close to his feet, lay the shattered butt of his revolver. The second mate twisted to the left for a brief glance. He saw that the guard was sitting upon the deck, rubbing his right shoulder. He looked wofully scared, while near by lay the cumbrous weapon with which he had been armed.

What had happened was now clear to the big officer. The man had fired at the protruding head—but a fraction too late—with the result that the bolt, with which the gun had been loaded, had stricken the passenger's revolver, destroying it and wounding his hand.

Even as the solution came to the officer, the guard had reached for his gun and scrambled to his feet. In another moment he would have clubbed the second mate, but that a bullet sent him twitching to the deck.

The second mate turned his pistol upon Pathan. Could he but rid the ship of that fiend, all might yet be well.

Yet, as he pressed the trigger for the

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second time, his elbow was jogged from within the house. He swore between his teeth and tried another shot, only to be warned by the unsatisfying click of the hammer that his ammunition had come to an end.

He drew away from the port with an angry gesture, and well it was for him that he did so, for one of the two at work upon the port, seeing that the weapon was empty of cartridges, had run at him with a hammer. The blow missed, and the following instant the second mate had slammed the covers and fastened up the port.

He turned and found the girl standing by him.

"Do you know," he said a trifle sternly, "you made me miss Pathan when you touched me. If I had shot that wretch the men would have been glad enough to come to terms."

He was hot with his failure, or he had not spoken so to her. And she, having but touched him because of the fear which had seized her at his rashness in so exposing himself, burst into crying; for she had been sorely overstrained with the rough happenings of late.

At this his anger left him and he made to comfort her, so, for that morning they sat together, she taking little heed of the various sounds about the house which told him that the fiends outside were preparing to batter down the door. They had covered up the second port immediately after his closing of the cover, so that he had no means of knowing how matters were progressing beyond such as his ears, trained in ship-craft, could tell him.

Very slowly the day passed to its close. He knew that the final struggle was at hand; but he did not by any means consider their chances of life beyond hope; for he knew that the crew had been greatly reduced, so that, could he but avoid the fire of the big musket, he might slay Pathan and put the rest to flight. Yet he had no knowledge but that the house might be their prison for a day or two longer; though, beyond that time they could not hope to stay, for of food they had but little, and less water.

The day had been a fine one, as they could tell by the light which came through the crevices around the somewhat loosely fitting door, and when at last the evening came, the girl went to the door to try to get a look at the sunset.

"Come and look, Jack," she said suddenly, after a period of silence.

He turned from the water breaker at which he was busy emptying the last few drops.

"What is it, Mary?"

His voice was perhaps a trifle uneasy, for he had made the discovery that there was left only half a pannikin of water. During the last two days of their imprisonment he had been limiting his allowance; for he would not see her stinted, and now, through some mischance, the spigot, which some one had fixed near the bottom of the little cask, had been loosened, and the small quantity of the imperative liquid which had been theirs was all squandered save for the drainings which he had emptied into the enameled mug.

He came across to where she stood. For the moment he was minded not to tell her, then, remembering because of the fiends outside, that a clear knowledge of their position was her due, he told her not only of this matter but of the likelihood of the crisis being near at hand.

When he had made an end, she reached up one hand to his shoulder, then held out the other for the mug. She drew him down to the crevice through which she had been peering.

"See," she said, "did you ever see such a sunset?" Her voice dropped. "And it may be our last, Jack." She patted his shoulder as she spoke. "You know, boy, I may be only a silly girl, but I know nothing but a miracle can save us."

It was the first time she had spoken out so plainly, and he, having nothing to answer, stared out blindly into the dying glory outside.

In a little, perhaps the half of a minute, she drew him back somewhat and held the little mug up before them.

"We will drink it together, darling," she whispered, and bent her head over and kissed the brim, then handed it to him; but he was not deceived.

"Fair play, little woman. You have drunk nothing."

He passed it back to her, and she, knowing him, sipped a little, then held it up to him and made him drink from her own hands. He was hideously thirsty, but controlled himself to one gulp only; then took the mug from her and set it down upon the table. For the end was not yet, and she might have need of it ere then.

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It was almost dark in the berth, for the oil of the lamp was done this long while, the only light they had coming in through the crannies about the door.

For a while the two of them stood together. He was deep in pondering as to when the attack would come. Probably as soon as it was dark; for, of course, they could not be absolutely sure that he had no further supply of cartridges.

She for her part was leaning forward, peering through the narrow opening at the red splendor of the sun's shroud. Once or twice she ran her fingers up and down this crack, as if she would fain enlarge it. Possibly the tips showed outside, for her hands were very slender; yet, however it may have been, it is certain that one of the devils upon the deck was attracted and crept up on tip-toe. Inside, the girl, staring out, saw something come abruptly between her and the sun. The second mate saw it at the same moment, else she had been dead on the instant.

He pushed her from him, out of a line with the crack, and in so doing brought himself almost directly opposite. There came a sudden spurt of flame into the semi-darkness of the house, and a tremendous report close up against the door. The girl gave a little scream which almost drowned her lover's moan of pain, but not quite.

"You are not hurt, dearest?" she cried out loud.

For a moment he did not answer, and in that quick silence she heard a man outside laugh brutally.

The second mate had his hand up to his eyes and was very silent. In the dimness of the place she saw that he was swaying upon his feet.

"Jack," she said in an intense whisper of fear. "Are you hurt?"

She caught his wrist with a gentle hold. Still he did not reply. Beyond the door she heard the murmur of voices, and odd words and fragments of sentences drifted to her uncomprehending brain.

"——for?"

"Fiddlin' at ther door!"

"——bust! The gun's busted!"

"Thank God!" It was the second mate who had spoken, and the girl loosed her hands from his wrists in her astonishment. Then, with a sudden applying of his words to satisfy the desire of her soul——

"You are not hurt, then, dear?"

"A—a little. My eyes——"

"What? Let me see!" But he swung round from her.

"Can you get me some—something for a bandage?" There was a desperate levelness in his tone.

He took two or three uncertain steps across the floor, as if bewildered. She followed him. He took his hands from his face and moved his head from side to side, as if peering about the house. Abruptly, he turned and blundered into her clumsily. She would have fallen, but that he caught and steadied her.

"Jack! Oh, Jack!" she cried, for even in the dimness of the place she had caught a glimpse of where his eyes ought to have been.

"It's all right, little woman," he replied in a voice that was nearly steady. "I—can't see very well while the pain's bad." He had covered his face again with his hands.

She answered nothing. She was tearing one of her undergarments into strips, and trying to quiet her sobs.

X

THE night had come. The second mate, the upper portion of his face swathed in wrappings, was seated on the sea-chest below his bunk. The girl was sitting by him, and their right hands were clasped.

The crack along the edge of the door had been stuffed up with a strip of blanket. Upon the edge of the table was stuck a tiny fragment of candle, and by the light of this she was reading slowly the betrothing passage from the Solemnization of Matrimony—that in which the man plights his troth. The second mate was repeating the words after her.

Presently they had made an end, and the girl slipped her hand gently from his; then, taking hold of his in turn, she read in a firm voice that passage in which the woman gives her troth. At the end, she released the second mate's hand and drew a ring from off one of her fingers. This she put gently into his hand. Then having given him her left, he slid the ring on her third finger, repeating the meanwhile, after her, the passage which she whispered to him.

And after that they sat a while, too full of thought for speech.

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Presently the candle went out abruptly, and the two were alone in the darkness.

From the deck beyond the door came an occasional mutter of speech, an occasional padding of feet and an occasional creaking of gear, and the two within sat and waited.

Toward midnight the moon rose and limned the outline of the door in pale light. Presently the girl spoke.

"The moon has risen, Jack."

She rose from his side and moved to the door. Perhaps she might be able to see what the crew were busied at. Abruptly, as she stooped forward to peer, something struck the door a tremendous blow, filling the interior of the house with a deafening, hollow boom. She cried out in fear, and even as she cried came the second blow and the crack of a breaking rivet.

She realized that the attack had begun, and groped a moment for the matches. She struck one and examined the door. To the casual glance it was unharmed; but by the light of the third match she made out that a rivet in the bottom hinge was snapped. By this, a dozen blows had been dealt, and yet, from the second mate, seated upon the sea-chest, no sound.

All at once he spoke.

"Come here, Mary."

She came to him quickly, wondering, half-consciously, at the strange harshness of his tone. By the light of the match which she carried, she saw that he had in his hand the revolver.

"It's no good, Jack," she said despairingly, thinking he had a mind that she should use it in their defense. "There are no cartridges!"

"I kept—one," he said with a jerk, and still in that unnatural voice.

He reached out his left hand to her. And at that she comprehended, and comprehending shrank back with a little wail.

"O-o-h! O-o-h! Jack!" she sobbed, with a sudden plumbing of the abyss of mortal terror.

There came a louder crash on the door, and then the second mate's voice.

"Mary!"

She went up to him, quivering.

"Not yet, Jack! Not yet!"

He put his left arm round her.

"Mary!" he said, and the fierce agony which possessed him spoke out in his voice. "Tell me when the door begins to go!"

And she knew that the time of the door's standing was the span of her life.

At each ringing thud of the ram she could feel the place quiver. By now it had become a steady, almost rhythmic *boom, boom, boom*, which, as a rivet gave, blent into a crash. The inside of the steel house was like the inside of a great drum.

And so a minute passed, and another, and still the door stood, while that dread booming beat out the knell of the two within —he grim for very fear of himself, and she shaking because of the thing that was to happen, and still with some room in her soul for his sufferings, yet unable to say anything; for in those last moments he had become her executioner as well as her lover, and there were things she could not say to the two.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Crash!

"Mary?" His voice sounded like the cry of a lost soul, and the love in the woman answered to it. Yet the physical terror of death was upon her.

"The—the door—is—is—*stop!* It's only the bottom hinge has broken. It isn't down yet!"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The girl, all of a shiver, turned suddenly and put her arms round his neck.

"Kiss me, Jack!"

Crash! Crash!

He repelled her for a moment, then, drawing her to him, kissed her good-by.

Crash! C-r-a-s-h!

"Don't! Don't! Not yet! It isn't down yet! Give me—give me as long as you—you can!"

For the arm about her shoulders had tightened with a sudden grip. Then abruptly—

"Have you—have you a—a—a knife, Jack?"

He took his arm from about her and brought something from behind, which he held out for her to take.

She saw it faintly by the glimmer of moonlight that came through the shaken door.

"No, no, no!" she cried, and shuddered. "You—you take it! Give me the pistol. I—I can see."

He gave up the revolver to her and shifted the knife to his right hand. Even as he did so, the door crashed in. He felt the girl thrill in the grip of his arm; then her right hand went up, and, an instant later

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came the click of the hammer, but no report —the cartridge had missed fire. She had aimed at a dark figure beyond the doorway, which she had recognized as Pathan. Yet the cruelty of fate denied her even the consolation of knowing that she died leaving her lover not at the mercy of that creature.

She cried out her dismay, and then again in terror, for the grip of the second mate's arm warned her that the end had indeed come. There came the rush of feet along the deck, and the blaze of a flare. Then Pathan's voice:

"Don't hurt the girl!"

She caught so much of it. Then the touch of her lover's fingers upon her breast made her quiver. She felt his right arm go back for the blow.

"Oh, my God, help me! Help me! Help me!" he heard her whispering desperately, and it shook him badly in that supreme moment. But, for the love he bore her, he meant that there should be no faltering in his stroke. Abruptly, the girl felt him start violently, and he began to quiver from head to feet. He cried out something in a strange voice.

"Oh, my God!" he said in a sort of whispering, husky shout. "I can see! I can see! Oh, my God, I can see! We're going to win! Mary, Mary! we're going to win! I can see! I can see! I can see! I tell you, I can see!"

He loosed her and put both his hands up to his bandages, which had slid down on to his nose, and tore them away in a mad kind of fashion, while the girl stood limp and sick against him, still half-fainting.

"I can see! I can see!" he began to reiterate again.

He seemed to have gone momentarily insane with the enormous revulsion from utter despair to hope. Suddenly he caught the girl madly into his arms, staring down at her through the darkness. He hugged her savagely to him, whispering hoarsely his refrain of:

"I can see! I can see! I tell you I can see!"

He held her a single instant or two like this; then he literally tossed her into one of the upper bunks.

"Don't move!" he whispered, his voice full of the most intense purpose. "I'm going to get square with that brute now. There's a chance for both of us. Here, take the knife in case I don't manage. Just lie still, whatever happens. You must be out of the way. I could tackle a hundred of them now."

He was silent, listening. By the sound of the men's voices, the second mate knew that they had halted some little distance from the doorway. There they hung for a few moments, no man anxious to be the first to face the big officer. For they had no knowledge of his blindness.

Then he caught Pathan's voice urging them on.

"Go on, lads! Go on! There won't be much fight left in him!"

At that, a feeling of dismay filled him. It was evident that Pathan was not going to head the attack, and he might die without ever getting his hands on to him.

From the irresolute men came a shuffle of feet. Then a man's voice rose—

"Trow de flare into ze hoose."

To the second mate the remark suggested a course of action. He threw himself upon a sea-chest, so that his face could be seen from the doorway. He kept perfectly still. If the man threw the flare into the house they would see his damaged face and think him dead. It might be that the coward Pathan would venture to come into the place—*then!*

Thud! Something struck the floor near him.

He kept his eyes shut. He could see no light; but the smell of burning paraffin was plain in his nostrils. He listened intently and seemed to catch the sound of stealthy footsteps. Abruptly, a voice just without the doorway shouted:

"They're both dead! Both of 'em!"

"What?"

It was Pathan's voice. He heard the noise of booted feet approaching at a run. They hesitated one instant on the threshold, then came within, and a surge of barefoot pads followed. The booted feet came to a stand not two yards away.

For an instant there was silence, a bewildered, awestruck silence. Pathan's voice broke it.

"My God!" he said. "My God!"

Immediately afterward he screamed, as the huge, blood-stained form of the big officer hurled itself upon him. There were cries from the men, and a pell-mell rush to escape. Some one fell upon the flare and extinguished it.

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There was a shivering silence. It was filled abruptly by the beginning of a sobbing entreaty from Pathan. This shrilled suddenly into a horrid screaming. The men were no longer trying for the doorway, for the second mate had got between it and them. They could see him indistinctly against the moonlight beyond. He was flogging the steel side of the house with something. Beyond the hideous thudding of the blows, the house was silent.

One of the crouched men, tortured to madness, threw a belaying-pin. The next instant the second mate hurled himself among them. He had the battered steel door for a weapon, and the edge of it was as a plowshare amidst soil.

Amid the cries of the men, the side of the house rang out a dull thunder beneath the weight of some blind, misdirected blow.

Most of the men escaped upon their hands and knees, creeping out behind the man who smote and smote. They got to the forecastle upon all fours, too terrified and bewildered even to get to their feet. There, in the darkness, behind closed and barred doors, they sat and sweated, in company of those who had hesitated to enter the house.

Presently the ship was quiet.

The berserker rage eased out of the second mate and he perceived that the house was empty, and the mutiny truly ended. He cast the heavy steel door clanging through the open doorway, out on to the main deck, a dripping testimony of a man's prowess against enormous odds.

He stood a moment, breathing heavily. Then, remembering, he wheeled round in the darkness to where, in the gloom of the upper bunk, the girl lay shivering, with her hands pressed tightly over her ears.

He caught her up in his great arms, with the one word, "Come!" and stepped through the open doorway into the moonlight, the fallen door ringing under his tread. Then, master of his ship, he carried her aft to the cabin.

THE DRIFTER

by PERCY W. REYNOLDS

RED BLOOD to the core of him and a smile in his deep brown eyes,
And he'll do a pal a favor when the luck of a good pal dies.
But he's hard on himself, this drifter, he's harder than lips can tell,
Though he never has seemed to reckon how near he has come to hell.

Wonderful way about him, a wonderful way with men,
Makes friends wherever he chooses then hits to the road again,
Out on the seas that call him, to the trails that few can find,
But this drifter, he locates them, for they're open to his kind.

Oh, a drifter always scents them, in the wilderness, the hills,
Some undiscovered sea-space that furnishes the thrills,
Some land beyond conception of the man who loves his rut
Is the land that tempts this drifter when the other gates are shut.

The world has stamped him failure, seared him with a burning brand,
But the world can't get his number, it will never understand
That call that sends him seeking for the never, never goal
With a heart clean full of longing and a weariness of soul.

Oh, the world will never grant it that a man who cuts his trace
Has a right to live and prosper in a human being's place,
It never knew and somehow it can never, never know
That a drifter is oft the dreamer that makes this old world go.

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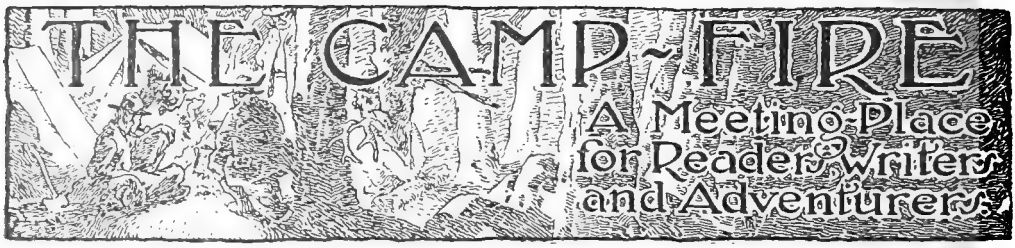

WHAT is betel nut? A word on this, and on our pet discussion about the running-powers of Indians, from Frank H. Huston:

No one chews betel nut; they chew areca nut wrapped in betel *leaf* smeared with lime and sometimes a bit of tobacco leaf. Areca nut in Malay is called *buyo* and the word is also applied to the "cud" —"he's chewing buyo," *i. e.* he has a cud in his jaw composed of a slice of areca nut wrapped in a lime-smeared (oyster-shell lime) betel leaf and rolled in a tobacco leaf, improving his digestion and stomach to the ruin of his teeth. When the teeth are all gone you get a joint of bamboo and grind the nut up in it and "carry on."

In re. "Injun" runners, Frank Ingalls, at one time warden, Yuma Pen., later Captain Terr. Militia and Territorial Surveyor General, can tell you something about Injun runners that will make you sit up and take notice. They always kept a few "regular" runners at the pen., and hired others when a man (convict) got out (they never escaped), and 100 or 150 miles a day is what is claimed these runners made (Yuma Apaches).

When the Papagoes strip stark and kick the medicine-ball it is claimed they will easily make 100 miles, driving the ball with the foot, in between sun-up and sun-down. I've seen 'em running the ball but never kept tabs as to endurance.

AN INTERESTING word from Robert J. Pearsall about his story in this issue:

There *was* a Koshinga the First at least, and the society called Ko Lao Hui was founded by him. It flourished secretly through the centuries, and a few years ago accomplished its first purpose, which was the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty. Among its members, which included practically all lower-class Chinese, the belief in a coming Superman similar to Koshinga the Last was very prevalent. Whether there was as good reason for this belief, as the fluent renegade whose words I have set down would have us believe, is at least an interesting matter for conjecture.

THE following letter, written before war was declared, I am more than glad to print. If all of us native-born had as fine and true an understanding of patriotism as has this foreign-born American our country would be many times blessed. Please note this letter especially, you who are so "practical" that you've forgotten it's always the idea that makes the thing:

I as a "foreigner," though American by choice, have often wanted to say a few words in regard to American patriotism and also in regard to the American (U. S. A.) attitude towards foreigners.

YOU can not live long in any American city, without getting a hunch that there is a difference between American patriotism and any other kind or brand of patriotism, but it takes a little delving and searching to discover the difference.

I believe the school-teacher is the one person who first has a chance to awaken love of Flag and Country in the child's breast, but ask the average school-teacher what the Flag stands for and you get a long rigmarole including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln—but no real explanation. Ask the average American-born young man what patriotism stands for and you get another explanation such as that the United States is the best country on earth, that it is the only country where a man is not a slave, the only country without any other aristocracy than the "sons and daughters of the Millions" and the "sons and daughters of the Revolution" (Switzerland and Norway not excepted) and that—and here comes the fine point —because he is an American he is as good as any other American and "better than anybody else."

THE trouble with the patriotism of the United States, if you can call it trouble, is that it is so young yet, lacks traditions, mixes a bit of self-conceit in with it. It will all come right in time and one thing that will help greatly will be universal military training.

When you have served under the Flag, saluted it morning and night, given years of the best part of your life for it, when your father, grandfather and forefathers before him for nearly a thousand years have served, fought, bled under the same Flag, then your Flag will mean to you what it ought to mean; then you won't allow a cheap vaudeville act to prostitute your Flag by waving it from the stage to raise applause; then you won't allow every moving-picture house to use the National Anthem as a chaser. I have given up going to picture-shows; it makes me burn with shame every time I see an American audience get up, put their coats and hats on and walk out to the strains of the most sacred

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song the country owns, the song that should be heard standing with your head bared.

NEXT time you see a battalion or regiment of soldiers march by and you see a civilian front and salute the Flag, you will know he is an AMERICAN. Ask him where he was born; ten to one he was *not* born in the United States. Next time you see the American Flag left to hang out after dark, which is showing the Flag the same respect that you would a dish-rag, go in the house, ask the man where he was born. Ten to one he was born *in* the United States.

If war should come, which God forbid, who will take the first hard knocks? I am guessing it will be foreign Americans or American foreigners, who have received a valuable military education to offer our adopted country, while they make soldiers out of the National Guard and the United States born volunteers.

Have I said too much? I have today seen a highly cultured volunteer American citizen insulted by a native-born taxi-driver who compared "you foreigners to us 'white' people." If I have said too much tear it up and forget it.—CARL BILSTED.

Adventure Twice a Month.

THE date has been definitely set for the first issue of *Adventure* under the new twice-a-month plan. It will be the mid-September number, on the stands about the middle of August. I know from your many letters that you are "for" the new departure and will give a friendly welcome to the first mid-month and its successors. Our Camp-Fire, of course, will remain as it is except that we'll be able to get together twice as often.

FROM Patrick Casey something about the story by himself and his brother in this number:

In 1909 and 1910 I was employed on the San Francisco *Examiner* as an assistant to the late W. W. Naughton, then the dean and premier of newspaper fight critics in the United States. It was my business, with other things such as reporting "outlaw" baseball, to cover the vicinal training-camps while pugilists were conditioning, to jump into the ring after the contests and get the boxed interviews of principals and referee, and once back in the office, to take Mr. Naughton's dictation of the story of the fight directly upon the typewriter.

IN THIS way, refreshing my memory from my newspaper clippings, I find that I witnessed some dozen championship or near-championship fights, and an innumerable number of preliminaries and four-round goes. In this way, I met ring-men off and on their guard.

I rode in a machine with Billy Papke and his brother, Ed, and listened to their vituperation of Ketchel. I was invited by Battling Nelson to dine with him. I came to know Willie Ritchie very well, ere he won to his short-lived championship. And once I was "bidded" by Jack Johnson to ride in his racing-car, but thought more of my neck than of notoriety.

I WAS at the ringside of the Nelson-Hyland fight, the fourth Ketchel-Papke go, the Young Corbett-Johnny Frayne contest, the "Harlem Tommy" Murphy-Owen Moran set-to, and the nimble exhibition of the bantams, Frankie Neil and Monte Attell.

I saw, close up, Jack Johnson's "golden smile" when Ketchel was supposed to have knocked him down, just before Johnson himself leaped up and knocked out Ketchel, breaking off, with one punch, two teeth in the front of Ketchel's mouth. I saw Johnson lift, with extended arms, the over two hundred pounds of Al Kaufman, then step, smilingly, into the very corner out of which Kaufman had been so anxious to get. I could hear the click of the incessantly working jaws of Leach Cross' gum-chewing brothers, as they seconded the New York dentist in his encounter with "Fighting Dick" Hyland.

I NOTICED the boil on Battling Nelson's wrist, the night before he lost his championship to Wolgast in the Richmond arena. I stood up in the drizzle that held through that fight, and splashed through the mud of Richmond in a try to follow the victorious Wolgast and get an interview. I remarked red-headed, clean-fighting, tragically fated Tommy McCarthy in the preliminaries at Coffroth's arena, long before he was killed in the ring by hitting his head upon a poorly padded canvas floor. I remember, now, I once saw poor Tommy in the mortar-whitened jumpers of a bricklayer—he was truly proud of his trade—awaiting Coffroth's pleasure in an outer office. A clean fighter, a sound liver, a good boy, Tommy, who tried too ambitiously.

ANOTHER clean fighter I used to delight in watching was Lew Powell. Maybe because he was tinged a red like myself. But anyway I'll never forget his twenty-round go with Wolgast, when Wolgast looped over his kidney punch, snapping Powell erect, sapping his vitality almost with the one blow. Powell told me about the effect of those loop kidney blows, afterward. I have attempted to put over those effects in this story of a fight.

I HAVE introduced other realities. The somersaulting of the *Gouger* in the end is one of these realities. I actually saw this occur. It was in the Powell-Johnny Frayne go. Powell knocked Frayne down, but not cold. Frayne's head bent under him; his legs lifted; he rolled over. He rolled over two, three, four times, very slowly. Then he lay still, unconscious. It was awful. It left a deep effect on my mind. And I remember it was a cause of wonder to me why none of the newspapers mentioned it, the following morning. Perhaps it was one of those shocking things of the ring which would not make good reading at the morning breakfast.

But we have made use of it. I actually saw Frayne roll over four times. We have had the Gouger roll over twice, with an attempt at a third roll. We do not feel that any reader would believe that a man, practically knocked out, could be able to somersault in agony four times. Yet I actually

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saw this occur. It is one of those instances where fact goes fiction one better.

IN THIS story we have introduced some well-known figures and places of the ring-game out here. The large white-haired announcer, with a voice of megaphone proportion, is, to be sure, the late Billy Jordan whose "Let 'er go!" was quite famous. The wooden, bowl-shaped arena is, thinly disguised, Coffroth's arena at Colma. And Hackett's is an utterly changed Millet's, where Nelson and Ketchel trained on several occasions. Truly, Millet's is a white two-storied road-house about a mile or more from Coffroth's arena along the Mission Road; but there is no stream anywhere near it and the gym is a barn, not a block away, but immediately behind. Our story necessitated the extra trimmings.

WE HAVE had the *Gouger* make use of Nelson's famous half-scissors hook. Nelson is very proud of that punch. Also, the *Gouger's* waiting tactics, ere entering the ring, are another leaf out of Nelson's book. I never shall forget how we waited in a drizzle for a full half-hour after Wolgast entered the Richmond arena ere Nelson appeared. And in that fight, as in our fight, Youth triumphed over Age: Nelson lost his championship to Wolgast.

The *Gouger's* expression about thinking, once, that "Hackett's was a palace," is the identical expression I heard Dick Wheeler give vent to, what time he was a sparring mate of Nelson at Millet's. We inserted it into our story in an attempt to show the great illusion young fighters have before they come up against the dismal reality.

I WAS talking to Jim Griffin, the referee, some time ago and I mentioned the fact that we were writing a story of a prize fight in the course of which we introduced Kid McCoy's resin trick. He thereupon told me of some forgotten fight in which, he said, —— had rubbed mustard and vinegar, or some such preparation, upon his gloves in order to smart the eyes of his opponent, thereby blinding him temporarily and having him at his mercy. There are endless stories about ——.

FROM Subig in the Philippines comes a contributor to "strangest place where a copy of *Adventure* has been found:"

During my wanderings about the globe, I picked up a copy of your magazine a few years ago and have been reading it continuously since. I have purchased it in the principal cities of the world; the most out-of-the-way place it was obtainable being Chung-king, China, a small city 1,500 miles up the Yangtze River.—THOS. T. TAYLOR.

AT A recent Camp-Fire we of the editorial staff asked the rest of you to tell us how you wished the synopses of our serials handled—type, style, length, etc. Many of you have written in and, at this writing, every single vote has been in favor of the method now in use. That settles that. Thanks.

One of the opinions came in the shape of a poem. The literary work of John Preston True is known to many of you. We're glad he chose the following form for his vote:

If you ask me my opinion,
Really want a true opinion,
True and honest, without feathers,
Feathers masking other notions
As to chapter-introductions:

I should answer, I should tell you,—
Do them all in finest typing,
Do them all in letters finest,
Letters all too small to read them
Without magnifying glasses.

Then we'd know the sign to skip 'em,
Skip the wordy introduction,
Skip the blue-jay sort o' chatter
Telling what we know already,
What we reveled, chuckled over,
What we quarreled, shouted over,
What we stowed in sure, safe keeping
For some other stormy reading
When the snow is hissing level,
When the geese are honking s'uthard,
When we live our joy-days over
By the crackle of the fire,
By the heart-o'-hickory fire,—
In back numbers of *Adventure*.

Good they are,—those introductions—
Good, but for new readers, only;
For new readers of *Adventure*,
Telling what they've missed already,
Bidding them to go a-gunning
In the musty, fusty byways,
In the buy-ways of the markets,
In the jungles of Back Numbers
Seeking there for past *Adventures*,
Read, and by unwise discarded.
Print for *them* the Introduction.

JOHN PRESTON TRUE.

A STRANGE happening. Sometimes I'm a little awed by the idea of how copies of this magazine go out from this one office in New York over a thousand long-wandering trails seemingly to all the nooks and crannies of the earth, to all the continents and all the seven seas. Rail, sail and steamship; horse, mule, foot and back; canoe, dug-out, raft. To the quiet home fireside, the distant trail, the battle-front. And always it binds together us who read it, binds us with tiny threads that often we do not even see.

A year or more ago there appeared in the "Camp-Fire" the following item. Some of you will remember it.

Card number —— was taken from the body of a wounded sergeant after the battle of Ypres. The body was found beside a wrecked motor-car with three saber wounds. I can not tell if this man lived

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or not, as shortly after I was myself wounded. The card slipped from the body as it was being carried to the dressing-station. I picked it up at the time, but lost track of it until today and discovered it in some papers and am notifying you as per card. Any more information I can give will be gladly given if wanted.—W. C. Dore, Kenora, Canada.

Recently a letter came to me from Maine. In it were two torn and worn pieces from a copy of the magazine, bearing the above item. Here is that letter:

Enclosed find clipping from *Adventure* of just what date I do not know. I have tried to locate both *Adventure* of that issue and also Mr. W. C. Dore. And am writing you in hopes you may be able to tell me. I wish to thank Mr. Dore and also *Adventure* for the service they rendered me.

Am just back after a little more than two years of it in France. Would like very much to have another card, or the old one if you have it.

I would deem it a great favor if you could let me know if I am able to obtain a back copy of the magazine of the issue I spoke of. Also if you have any record of Mr. W. C. Dore's address other than Kenora, Canada, as I wrote to that address from England and had my letter returned. ————.

Those few printed words on a piece of paper had wandered around the world until they found the sergeant who was being carried from the field to live or die. Where they found him I do not know, but they found him.

But the other man is lost. Letters to Kenora return unclaimed. From the sergeant I've had several other letters, one telling me his first could be shown to the Camp-Fire if I withheld his name, the last saying that he is off once more for the fighting in Europe. Now we must find Mr. Dore so that I can put him in touch with the sergeant.

A LETTER from J. W. Orr of Voslah, Virginia, tells us that authoritative dope on Tiburon Island and the Seri Indians can be obtained from the U. S. Bureau of Ethnology, Washington, D. C. Let me suggest that if you'll write to Washington for a catalogue of all Government publications, as stated in "Standing Information" under "Ask Adventure," you'll get in touch with a supply of information that will amaze most of you by both its amount and the wide variety of fields covered.

Here is a letter from Jackson Gregory out in California quoting one of the Ethnological reports upon these same Seri Indians and giving us fresh data on our old discussion on the running power of a human being:

In connection with the running ability of certain American Indians, here are some points which may be of interest, taken from "The Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology:"

SPEAKING of the Seris, habitat eastern portions of the Gulf of California coast and Tiburon Island in the gulf itself:

"The hardly conceivable fleetness of the Seri is conformable with their habitual rovingness and their ability as burden-bearers; and this faculty is established by cumulative evidence so voluminous and consistent as to outweigh the presumption arising from the standards attained among other peoples."—P. 149.

". . . . a Seri matron with a sick child nearly a year old; in the evening the child was worse and the matron took the trail about dusk in the hope of finding a cure in the white man's touch or other medicine—and at dawn next morning she was at Molino del Encinas, seventeen leagues (nearly forty-five miles) away with her helpless child and a peace offering in the form of a hare which she had run down and caught in the course of the journey."—P. 150.

". . . . matrons, with children astride their hips and water-filled ollas balanced on their heads, and all their goods and chattels piled on their backs, habitually traverse Desierto Encinas from the sea to Costa Rica (some thirty miles), or from Costa Rica to the sea, in a night."—P. 150.

"The Seri range over a region of runners; the Opata themselves are no mean racers, since, according to Velasco and Bartlett, 'In twenty-four hours they have been known to run from forty to fifty leagues, (from one hundred and five to one hundred and thirty miles.)"—P. 125.

QUOTED from the American Anthropologist, Vol. viii, p. 92: "An Indian has been known to carry a letter from Guazapares to Chihuahua and back again in five days, the distance being nearly eight hundred miles. . . . They will outrun any horse if you give them time enough. They will pursue deer in the snow or with dogs in the rain for days and days, until at last the animal is cornered and shot with arrows or falls an easy prey from sheer exhaustion, its hoofs dropping off."—P. 125.

And so on. There is a lot of available evidence to indicate in no uncertain terms that certain of the North American Indians do rather amazing things in endurance racing. I merely mention these matters because of the interest which my Indian runner in the "Yahoya" story stirred up in Camp-Fire.

APROPOS of nothing in particular, and just to "get it off my chest" where it's rested pretty heavy for some years, I'm pleased to note that the country is beginning to see which is really the better man and the better citizen, the enlisted man of our Army, Navy or Marine Corps or the

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snob who objects to having this man in our country's uniform use the same theater or hotel dining-room that he does. My own opinion of the snob—well, having myself suggested that fool rule about cussing at our Camp-Fire, I'll have to close this item right here.

Do You Want This Month's Cover, Free from Type, for Framing?

SINCE *Adventure* began the present new style of covers so many of you have expressed your satisfaction and so many have written asking for reproductions for framing that this month we are doing something we have never done before. Hitherto we could not supply cover reproductions without any printing on them because it required special plates and press-runs. But the demand has been so strong and this month's cover seems to us so good and so especially adapted for framing or wall use that we have printed one thousand of them for that purpose.

These reproductions are exact duplicates of the cover itself except that the words "*Adventure*" and "July, 1917, 15c," do not appear, the original design showing complete. We will mail one of these reproductions, prepaid, on receipt of 25 cents.

THE artist, Mr. Percy E. Cowan, knows his subject at first-hand. His reputation is rapidly growing and we here in the office, as well as others, believe the day is coming when his work will be at a premium.

We are, of course, selling these reproductions at a good profit to ourselves and I do not urge any of you to buy. But if you want them we can supply them, up to the number stated.

Please note this carefully. None of *Adventure's* covers, except this month's, can be supplied in this form, so there's no use writing in about them. Some of our future covers may be offered in reproduction, but, if so, a special notice will appear in the issues that bear them. Unless you see such a notice you will know that reproductions are not obtainable.

WITH international and national events moving so rapidly it is hard to select items for our Camp-Fire. What is all right at the time it goes to the printer may, by the time it reaches you two or three months later, make dull or strange reading. Please don't lose sight of that. In a way it's good to have our Camp-Fire go on much as usual in these troublous days, yet there are things many of us would like to say if they could be heard at the time they were said.

FROM our friend Harry C. Winters, "somewhere in France:"

A line to let you know am still very much alive. Am now in Infantry in a regiment you have probably heard a great deal of. It has worthily upheld the best traditions of the British Empire. How are the folks out your side taking the latest development? Are they coming in? Don't let Bill pull all the tail-feathers out of the eagle.

BY THE time this reaches you many will have become familiar with the new Vigilante movement, but it is so important and so indicative of a better order of things that its exact nature and program are given here in full. It is "an organization of writers, artists and others for patriotic purposes" and if you can contribute your services in any way it will be help to a good cause. All contributions are, of course, given freely and entirely to the organization, which is in no way a money-making institution. The list of "members" is only an early list; good names are being added every day, among them, I'm glad to say, many of our own writers.

Executive Committee—Porter Emerson Browne, Thomas C. Desmond, Monroe Douglas Robinson, Hermann Hagedorn, Charles Hanson Towne, Julian Street. J. Harry Welling, Executive Secretary.

OBJECTS OF "THE VIGILANTES"

1. To do their part in arousing the country to a realization of the importance of the problems confronting the American people.

2. To aid in awakening and cultivating in the youth of the country a sense of public service and an intelligent interest in citizenship and national problems.

3. To work vigorously for preparedness; mental, moral and physical.

4. To work with especial vigor for Universal Military Training and Service, exclusively under *Federal* control, as a basic principle of American democracy.

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

"*The Vigilantes*" are organized to procure from writers and artists the livest sort of articles, poems, or cartoons, on whatever phase of America's present situation seems to the individual contributor most vital.

These they intend to syndicate to a news-service

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which will include practically every newspaper of any importance in the country.

The articles will be high-spirited, good-humored, humorous, imaginative and absolutely non-partisan. They will be brief, moreover, none probably exceeding one thousand words, the primary object of "*The Vigilantes*" being to arouse rather than to lecture.

Writers and artists who desire to offer for service to their country that weapon which is said to be mightier than the sword, are requested to communicate at once with the Executive Secretary.

Among those who have joined "*The Vigilantes*" and expressed their willingness to supply articles or drawings, are the following:

George Ade, Samuel Hopkins Adams, Matthew Page Andrews, Mary Austin, Irving Bacheller, James Barnes, Rex Beach, Cyrus Townsend Brady, Thornton W. Burgess, Ellis Parker Butler, Robert W. Chambers, Joe Mitchell Chapple, Irvin S. Cobb, Douglas Fairbanks, Louis Fancher, James Montgomery Flagg, Hamlin Garland, Charles Dana Gibson, Robert Grant, William Hard, Albert Bushnell Hart, Brian Hooker, Arthur S. Hoffman, Emerson Hough, Reginald Wright Kauffman, Henry Churchill King, Theodore Marburg, Don Marquis, Hy. Mayer, Wallace Morgan, Meredith Nicholson, Gustavus Ohlinger, Ralph Barton Perry, Tyrone Power, Harold T. Pulsifer, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Theodore Roosevelt, Clinton Scollard, J. André Smith, James Swinnerton, Booth Tarkington, Augustus Thomas, Hendrik Willem van Loon, William Allen White.

Headquarters: Room 1001, 110 West 34th St., New York City.

One thing you can certainly do—see to it that the editor of every one of your local papers is made acquainted with the good work the Vigilantes are doing and urge him, as a loyal American citizen, to use their syndicate service in his paper. It will cost him nothing; papers in the same town will be given different articles; if an editor can't see the need of universal training he can at least see the need of good citizenship and be supplied accordingly. Later longer articles will be supplied at a nominal cost. It isn't every day he can get, at any price, articles by such famous writers as George Ade, Rex Beach, Robert W. Chambers, Irvin S. Cobb, Booth Tarkington and William Allen White. He's lucky to get such articles and it's his duty to use them. Make it your business to see that he does.

THIS "Happy New Year" reached me in March. Surely the sender has known adventure. Incidentally, here is another strange place where a copy of *Adventure* has been found:

Triang Estate, Triang, State of Pahang,
Federated Malay States.
January 1, 1917.

"Happy New Year to you." I suppose a good many wanderers have sent the same greeting from as many out-of-the-way places as this, so you ought not to be shocked.

I am a discharged soldier from the present war, having served in the "Legionaires," a crazy part of the French Army (between you and me the very best fighting unit in existence). I mean the "old-timers," we who had already seen a bit in Algiers. Believe me, we saw several bits from Mons to the Marne. Of the newer Legion of course I know nothing, but there will never be again such a devil-may-care, reckless, whole-hearted body of men, I don't believe; after-war conditions would not allow of it.

I have not seen a late copy of *Adventure* in so long. I have an old torn copy I found when I came here, dated February, 1916.

This place is right in the midst of the jungle, only a new estate. We have to send some 200 miles for our food-supplies and the prices are terrible. We have lots of company, though; there are all sorts of insects, reptiles, tigers and elephants, but the latter are going further back into the jungle, owing to the coming of the railway. The steam horse is too much for them.

I am here under contract to erect engine, boiler and general equipment for a new tapioca factory, but will be finished next week and will go down to Singapore, thence to Bangkok, Siam. Find some of your readers who would like to correspond. I'm lonesome. I am the only white man, the manager being a Chinese lawyer. Good luck to old *Adventure*. If you can find any one wishing to write, here is the address.—GEORGE D. CAMPBELL, care American Consul's Office, Bangkok, Siam.

IF YOU will watch the advertising pages that are gradually being added to the magazine you will see them develop into a feature quite distinct from the advertising pages of any other magazine. Watch 'em do it. *Adventure* likes to keep itself individual, with a character of its own, and our advertising department believes in this as much as do we of the editorial.

As time goes on I think you'll find the advertising pages not only of practical value in presenting the best guns and outdoor equipment of all kinds but a feature interesting in itself. And it's going to do something else:—

THROUGH its far-wandering readers, *Adventure* is in a position to collect some of the most interesting photographs in the world. Since pages must be added to a magazine by fours, eights, or sixteens, there will frequently be some open pages of coated paper suitable for reproducing photographs. And there we are!

We want photographs of strange things and far places. All must bear upon the general field of adventure and, if possible, should tell a story, show action, or set forth

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something or somebody made famous by action. We will take only the *best* photographs. If you have one or more that you are sure are "best," won't you send them in? We'll gladly pay a dollar for each one used and, if desired, will return the photograph after use.

PLEASE note this: *Do not send us photographs that are copyrighted* or have been published elsewhere *unless* they are accompanied by a legal release given by the holder of that copyright. Nearly all post-card photos are copyrighted and therefore unavailable; also most of them do not reproduce well. The letter *C* on a photo is enough to show that it is copyrighted.

A smooth finish reproduces better than a rough, a brown better than a gray.

Send return postage with photographs, just as in the case of manuscripts. If they are used, it will be returned to you. And send us only the very interesting ones. *Adventure's* readers have seen lots of ordinary photographs; send only those that will really make them sit up and take notice.

ONE of you writes the following. And if all the rest of us would own up I imagine he'd find he had quite a lot of company. Several have already done so.

I don't mind saying I cried over the end of Talbot Mundy's "The Soul of a Regiment."

THERE are 600,000 boys in our high schools and therefore to that extent organized. Each one entitled by law to an old-model rifle and forty rounds from the Government. Many want military training; all ought to have it; in New York alone do they get it, under a State compulsory service law. By the time this reaches you we may have compulsory service for adults; if not, then surely later. But that will not reach boys in high school. These boys need it physically, socially, morally and for the sake of their country. It will not only make them better defenders but this preliminary instruction will give them immense advantage in the matter of personal advancement and rank.

They don't get it now because two things have been lacking—a definite organization and competent instructors. The first need has been supplied by the High-School Volunteers of the United States. Under their system 30,000 boys are already being drilled (April, 1917). Most of the other boys are equally willing. It is the lack of additional instructors that prevents. Among you who read this are many that can give this instruction—ex-regulars, graduates of military schools, land-grant colleges or Plattsburg camps. If you can't go to the front, here is the chance to do your bit—a big bit. The High-School Volunteers has positions open at regular instructors' salaries, in dozens of high schools, for drilled men of good character who like and can manage boys. Many places want volunteer instructors for two or three hours per week. Only short period of coaching necessary. Write Captain E. Z. Steever, Supervisor of Military Instruction, Central Department, Culver, Indiana.

SEVERAL of you have written in questioning Douglas S. Watson's story of the oil-fields, "At the Mercy of Bill Gunn," as to technicalities pertaining to drilling for oil. Mr. Watson, himself an oil man, makes the point that his story is laid in California, where methods differ from those in Oklahoma and elsewhere, and refers his critics to the article on "Petroleum" in the "Encyclopedia Britannica." Also, he writes me this:

What *Steve* is made to do was actually done, and the man who did it is living today right in the Kern County field. In the Fall of 1909 he was superintendent for my partner, Mr. William T. Garrett, and me, on the South Kern lease. His name is George Rupp and his address is R. F. D., Oilcenter, Kern Co., California. If first-hand information is wanted, here it is within reach.

Mr. Watson and his critics are at this writing still arguing over a question of optics that arose in the story and I don't know who is going to win out, but Mr. Watson seems to have proved sound on all the other points raised.

P. S. (later). He wins on optics too. Sends me written endorsement of a professor of physics in a California university.

WHAT will have happened by the time this reaches you no man knows. What will happen during the next few years is even less known to any man. But the events of the past three years should, God knows, make it plain that our country *can* be drawn into international dangers that once seemed remote. Our isolation no longer protects our wealth and our

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helplessness. We must protect ourselves. We must do more. We must be strong enough to *enforce* peace, to *prevent* wars.

Sanity and common sense demand three things of us. First, universal compulsory military training, the only fair and democratic system. And it must be under *Federal* control. The National Guard system is an ineffective, miserable makeshift, a half-baked attempt at the real thing. We need *an army*, not forty-eight little armies without real cohesion and without effective control.

Second, a well-balanced fleet second to England's only.

Third, the biggest and most efficient air-fleet in the world.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure's* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

A free department for the benefit of those readers who wish to buy or sell back copies of this magazine.

Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

Will sell: 1912, Mch., May, July, Aug., Sept., Nov., 1913, Apl., Nov.; 1914, Apl.; 1915, Mch. Or will exchange for other reading matter.—MRS. A. F. BERNARD, Ponder, Mo.

Want: 1915, Dec.; 1916, Jan., Feb.—LAWRENCE MCCANLEY, Box 52, Littell, Wash.

Will sell; complete from June, 1913, to June, 1916, except Feb., 1915. 10 cents each plus freight.—R. W. LOVESY, Briggsville, Wis.

Will sell; 1911, except Jan., Sept.; 1912, except Feb., Oct., Nov., Dec.; 1913, except Jan., Mch.; 1914 and 1915 complete; 1916, except June; 1917 to date. $5. plus freight.—A. S. BRIAN, Mt. Kisco, N. Y.

Will sell; Nov., 1912, to Dec., 1916. $5.—C. S. BROOKS, R. F. D. 1, Box 1, Kingston, N. Y.

Will sell; 1911, Jan., June; 1912, June, Nov., Dec., 1913, May, June. 25 cents each.—E. E. H. WILDMAN, Box 1, Norwalk, O.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten, double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use only a very few fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of every six or seven inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Adventurers' Club—No connection with this magazine, but data will be furnished by us. Can join only by attending a meeting of an existing chapter or starting a new chapter as provided in the Club's rules.

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. Entirely separate from Adventurers' Club, but, like it, first suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

National School Camp Ass'n—Military and industrial training and camps for boys 12 or over. Address 1 Broadway, New York City.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—A similar organization coöperating with the N. S. C. A. (above). Address EVERYBODY'S, Spring and Macdougal, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue or the one—or possibly two—following it.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, but no question answered unless stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America; Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE, *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal, Can. ★ Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; *especially*, seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to laws, customs and conditions local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Wallace.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N.Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. North American Snow Countries Part 1
C. L. GILMAN, 708 Oneida Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. ★ Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. ★ Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

13. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 805 Jackson St., Santa Clara, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel: boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

15. Hawaiian Islands
D. L. MACKAYE, Territorial Board of Health, Honolulu, Hawaii. Covering travel, customs, natural history, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

16. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras,

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Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

17. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

18. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

19. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

20. Russia and Eastern Siberia
A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Adventurers' Club, 26 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

21. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

22. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

23. ★★ The South Seas Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 2 cents NOT attached)*

Gordon McCreagh and E. E. Harriman have been called to the defense of our country. We hope you will be patient if answers from them are at times delayed.

The Fever Coasts of West Africa

Question:—"I am writing regarding the gold, ivory and fever coasts of West Africa. I would like to know about expenses and outfitting; also about trade and people and their ways of living."——

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—You enquire about the West Coasts of Africa—trade, expenses, outfitting and especially about the people.

In general outline the natives are of the stock from which the American negro comes, with lighter and more civilized races in the hinterlands, semi-civilized people living neighbors to savages out and out.

The whites in West Africa are comparatively few compared with the blacks. It is an exceedingly unhealthy country, being known as the White Man's Grave. The climate is tropical, with sharply defined wet and dry seasons.

A person intending to see the country as a traveler must be prepared to go to considerable outlay of money. Of course if you are a seasoned fellow and can "travel light" as we say in Africa, meaning going without the luxuries of civilization and reducing down to blanket, tent, field-clothes and cooking-pot, and if your palate is trained to enjoy what the land you find yourself in offers, you could get through a few months there and see a great deal of the country, roughing it up the Niger by canoe, for which you must hire its native owner, for—to give a round figure—say two hundred and fifty dollars, which would also be about the cost of getting there.

A better way, I think, would be to offer your services to John Holt Company, Liverpool, or the Niger Company, Victoria Embankment, London. The custom is a three-years contract, on small salary, but the companies house and feed their officers well, and if you like loneliness and autocracy I don't know where you can better beat it than as agent of a Niger trading-station. Still, if you could afford it and could get a couple of fellows to join you, the trip could be done for about fifteen per cent. less.

About the "customs and ways of the people;" you will probably find in your public library a book by Major Leonard on the superstitions of West Africa—the ju-ju and witchcraft and devil worship. You will find it fascinating reading.

Now if you really mean business and want details about outfitting I shall be glad to supply them. If I knew what you had in mind I could better reply to your letter. So many of my correspondents write in this nebulous way, without defining their objective, that I feel I am throwing away a great deal of labor. But where the spirit of adventure runs true and I find the inquirer really anxious for the big wide world, the labor is a love.

Rocky Mountain Prospecting

Question:—"I am batching up near the Beartooth Mountains in Montana, and have heard people speak of gold prospectors being over this country, so would like to ask if there is any real prospecting going on in the Rocky Mountains in this region; also, can you tell me what a prospector's outfit consists of?

Is a prospector's pan just an ordinary pan or a special made one?

"Of what is a prospector's cradle made?

"Are there any ground formations for gold?"—W. B. CONNER, Musgrave, Mont.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—As far as my knowledge goes, and as far as I can ascertain from others, the prospecting in the Rockies at the present time is comparatively small. There is much more being carried on west of the range, in the Sierra Nevadas, the Cascades, and the desert country. Montana

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has so many deposits of so many kinds that it is not likely that prospecting will entirely cease in that region for many decades. Yet the bulk of such activities seem to be removed to other grounds.

A prospector's outfit consists, first, of a burro to carry the pack. Next, a tarpaulin and blankets for bed. A belt pick, which has a point at one end and hammer at the other, a pan which is made of strong metal and has flaring sides, like a deep plate, a shovel and ordinary pick, acid for tests, a billycan for coffee, a frying-pan, sheath-knife, steel fork, a spoon for mixing batter, small spoon, tin cup, tin plate, an ax, plenty of grub, a six-gun, fishline if where fish are found.

That about covers the list needed. If a man is desirous of putting on more style, he may take a separate pan for mixing his bread and pancake batter, but the prospector's pan has filled the bill for hundreds. Sometimes a rifle is carried, stuck in the ropes on the pack, ready for any game that may appear. Add a canteen for the dry land and a man who knows how can prospect any part of the country.

The cradle is built of wood, shaped very much like a baby cradle, rockers underneath in same way, the sides made high at one end and topped with a shallow box with screen or slat bottom. The lower part of the cradle has ribs or riffles running crossways, over which the water carries the dirt and sand. The sides slope down from the high end which carries the screen, to almost flush with the riffles. The dirt and gravel is shoveled into the box and water is poured on it, carrying the fine stuff through to the riffles. The rocks are thrown out of the box by hand. The miner has a handle sticking up at the high end by which he rocks the cradle, causing a more thorough washing of the gravel. The gold being heavier, drops between the riffles, while the dirt and waste is carried over and away.

Gold is where you find it, say old miners, and that is the only rule they can lay down. Alaska upset all preconceived notions and rules. The tundra should have been barren of gold, according to the old ideas. Gold is found in a multitude of formations. I have seen it where old forty-niners said it could not possibly exist.

House-Boating on the Mississippi

Question:—"Where is the best place to purchase a house-boat for travel on Ohio and Mississippi Rivers—Pittsburgh or smaller towns down the river?

"2. What will be the cost?

"3. What will be the best time to leave?"—SENECA E. GRISWOLD, East Orange, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—The purchase and price of a shanty-boat depends mostly on luck; you might find just what you wanted at Pittsburgh, either on the Monongahela or the Alleghany rivers, or you might have to trip down the Ohio on a steamer, and pick one up at some landing. The farther down the river, the cheaper the boat is apt to be. Thus a $200 boat at Pittsburgh would be likely to sell for $150 at Cincinnati, $100 at Memphis, etc.

Perhaps you would better consider building one; you would be able to build a small house-boat with $50 worth of lumber, say, or even less. A boat 22 feet long, 8 wide, and 28 inches deep hull would take you to New Orleans, easily—and have 12 or 14 foot cabin. With a carpenter to help build, it would take only a few days.

2. The cost of a boat of this size would be from $50 to $150, depending on luck and kind of a boat—good lumber, new boat, etc., second-hand.

3. If you are going to go right through, just for the trip, you could probably make the trip from Pittsburgh to New Orleans, 2,018 miles, in 100 days, tying up for nights and for wind. October and November for the Ohio, and December and January for the Mississippi. This is fast house-boat time; I would rather start about September 10, and take 150 or 200 days from that date. I was seven months between St. Louis and Morgan City, (Atchafalaya River, La.), about 1,200 miles.

Big-Game Rifles

Question:—"My son is in Buloh Kasap, Malay States. I want to procure a suitable gun for his use on big game. I want a serviceable rather than an expensive one.

"Can you tell me what I want, where obtained, and cost?"—F. A. DILLINGHAM, Waterbury, Ct.

Answer, by Mr. McCreagh:—Since you give no indication of what you consider a moderate price for a rifle, and since rifle prices range all the way from about twenty dollars to a hundred and fifty, it is difficult to make an arbitrary selection. I will therefore have to answer your inquiry rather by generalities, and leave the final selection to your own discretion.

I have no hesitation in advising that rifles of the cheaper grades should be left out of consideration altogether. In the Federated Malay States your son is likely to meet game as formidable as sine, gaur, and even the white rhinoceros. Elephant, he may not shoot, as they are protected by the government. There is no question, then, that he will need a good gun.

Were price no object, there can be no question, as I think will be admitted by any unbiased dealer, that the "Westley Richards .425" stands out by a mile from all the others. Unfortunately, however, so does the price, which is $165. I will therefore not consider it.

To come down, then, to more medium-priced weapons which are at the same time thoroughly efficient and reliable, two principal points must be borne in mind—*striking* energy and trajectory. I lay emphasis on "striking" for the reason that the unwary purchaser is apt to be led astray by glib small-bore advertisements claiming a muzzle-energy which runs up into the three thousands and carefully glossing over the fact that at three hundred yards, which may be taken as a fair average of the distance at which the bullet will strike its game, that same enormous muzzle-energy has dropped to about one-third. (Besides energy and trajectory, velocity, powder charge and weight of bullet are important factors; but they need not be discussed as their combined practical application is demonstrated in the first two.) For the rest, all the leading makers turn out a weapon which is properly balanced and well finished in every way.

Keeping the foregoing in view I proceed to a few specific examples which leave you a wide range in price.

For a thoroughly efficient rifle for all-round use I would say that the "Ross High Power .280 Caliber" stands preeminent. In spite of the comparatively small caliber the striking-energy at three hundred yards is no less than 2,016 foot-pounds. The trajectory is as low as 1.600 at five hundred

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yards, which means that three hundred yards is a practical pointblank range. The 180-grain copper-protected bullet ensures all the non-fouling, non-"upsetting" and mushrooming features which are so vital. The weight of the rifle is 7¾ pounds, 26-inch barrel, bolt-action with throw-over safety and five-shot flush magazine.

I could not recommend a better rifle at $55.

A somewhat cheaper rifle, and yet a beautiful weapon with a perfect balance, is the new "Savage 25-30." This rifle, like the Ross, has a point-blank trajectory at three hundred yards; but the striking energy is not more than 800 pounds at that distance, which, however, is shock enough to drop in its tracks any big game except perhaps gaur and rhinoceros, though even these may surely be killed. This is a lever-action, five-shot flush magazine, press-button safety, 22-inch barrel rifle with an advantage over the Ross in its takedown feature. Altogether a splendid weapon; but in my opinion a trifle light for the heaviest game. Price $30.

Let me say, however, that a man may spend a life-time in the Malay States without ever seeing buffalo or rhino unless he makes it his special business to go far into the interior to look for them.

Another rifle of a very well known and justly famous make is the "Winchester 401 High Power." Trajectory 1.66, *i. e.* practical pointblank; striking energy 900 foot-pounds. This is one of the new auto-loading actions, which, of course, have the advantage of extremely rapid shooting. Weight 7¾ pounds, six-shot box magazine. An excellent weapon, worthy of the maker's reputation.

The price is $29.

I would not like to recommend a cheaper rifle for a country like the Federated Malay States. The above, however, give you a very reasonable choice as to price and "action." Every hunter has his own preferences about the latter; I can not say what your son would like. I might inform you, however, if there is no particular reason for purchasing a rifle in this country, that Messrs Manton & Co. of Calcutta and Singapore can offer a wide selection of suitable weapons.

I almost omitted to mention the Mauser and Männlicher rifles, which are most excellent and inexpensive. But I do not recommend them, as ammunition during the war and for a considerable time after will be practically impossible to obtain in any British-controlled district.

Any of those I have named may be purchased at any reputable dealer's. The prices I quote are from the catalog of the New York Sporting Goods Store. Should you care to call there personally I am sure that their Mr. Fisher will give you courteous treatment and much valuable advice.

The Men Who Answer Your Questions—Why They Can

Islands and Coasts, Captain Dingle

MY KNOWLEDGE of the coasts and islands covered by my department is that of a seaman and traveler. While in many ways not as exhaustive perhaps as the data contained in the guide-books, I believe my information is likely to prove rather more practical.

The Mediterranean I became acquainted with fairly intimately in the course of yachting cruises and trading voyages, and there are few ports large enough to admit a vessel that I have not at least touched at. Most of the ports and islands I know intimately.

The islands of the Atlantic Ocean, north and south, I have visited—most of them repeatedly—as trader, amateur treasure-hunter, and officer or commander of deep-water vessels. The Indian Ocean islands—perhaps the least well-known yet most interesting of all—I became familiar with while in a man-o'-war on that station, and after that date during some trading adventures with a free-lance skipper who thought no port small so long as its resources promised to fill his holds.

THE coasts, ports and peoples of the southern extremity of South America were covered with a privately equipped expedition, and other knowledge was gleaned in the ordinary way of seafaring. From Valparaiso to the River Plate, both by way of Cape Horn and by the Straits of Magellan, I have assisted in soundings and surveys that carried me into almost any creek and corner that would carry six feet of draft. With a party, I have traveled on foot for several weeks across the tip of the continent; living by the interchange of belongings with the people; in a small, half-decked boat, we passed through Beagle Channel and the Straits of Le Maire.

AMONG other things which have given me some small degree of information that may be useful, these may be mentioned briefly: Hunted wild goats on Cyprus and Saint Paul, and tame ones on Gozo. Landed relief boats on Tristan d'Acunha and helped the small colony to kill some hundreds of rats with which the island is infested. Caught penguins and seals on Crozets Islands, and carried out diving operations there for a wreck. Dug over the Salvages Islands in a futile search for reputed silver bars; took a fifty-ton ketch yacht with an amateur crew of three on a 12,000-mile cruise over the North Atlantic, during which most of the islands between ten degrees and forty degrees north latitude were visited and largely explored. Caught tarpon in the Caribbean, and octopus in the Indian Ocean: traded hard biscuit for gold-dust in Magellan Straits, and was compelled to hold a hostage until the boat was in deep water to avoid losing bread, dust and, most likely, the boat, crew and equipment altogether.

I have had a great deal of interesting sport in an irregular way off the beaten track of tourists, along little-known coasts, and around less-known islands. Information along these lines is, after all, most likely to be acceptable, since the many bureaus and agencies keep on tap an inexhaustible fund of data of the more stereotyped description.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE.

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Eastern U. S. Part II, Hapsburg Liebe

WITH absolutely no desire to "stretch my blanket," I am going to tell you that I believe I know the Southern mountains and their people, their fish and their game and their logging and lumbering operations, as well as any other living man. I was born there, on a little farm on Lick Creek, which lies between Cold Spring Mountain and a mountain which took its name from a wild bay horse that used it for a habitat about the time of the Civil War—Bay's Mountain, it is. Therefore when I am in the Southern mountains I am in my own country. As a timberjack, river driver and sawmill man, I have spent years on the great and swamp-lined Southern rivers; and during these years I took every opportunity, and these came often, to study the wild and strange life of the canebrakes, to hunt the deer and the little black bear and the wild turkey and to fish for fish ranging in size from the ordinary grass pike or white-breasted trout to the sturgeon or the cat as big as a man.—HAPSBURG LIEBE.

North American Snow Countries, Part II, S. E. Sangster

IN RISING to introduce myself to the outdoor brotherhood before *Adventure's* Camp-Fire I wish, first, to say the idea of "our magazine" in this "Ask Adventure" department is purely that of providing a means whereby you fellows who want some live dope concerning the various regions of the outdoor world can for the asking secure from us all the help we can give. Let us get together.

CONCERNING myself would say I was born in 1883 in the town of Port Perry, which lies at the very head of the Kawartha lakes, which were and even yet are famed for their wonderful fishing, and with, on my paternal side particularly, a natural love for the open and its game and fish, needless to say I took to the open as a duck to water, spending my boyhood sailing, cruising, fishing and hunting every spare moment—to the neglect very often of my studies. The many narrow escapes from drowning convinced me I was not born to drown. Matriculated and was destined to follow my dad's footsteps in the medical profession, but took the bit in my teeth and, overriding parental objection, when eighteen joined the N. W. M. Police where my inborn love for the open had, in those days of the open, unfenced prairie, scope for adventure.

IN MY police capacity traveled pretty much the whole of the old Territories of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan and Alberta, from Butte City and Wood Mountain north to Great Slave Lake and west to the Rockies; spent two months breaking in remounts, when I got pretty much my fill of rough-riding. Owing to family reasons, was induced to resign from the Force and the following year entered the service of the Indian Department (Canadian Government), remaining therein for some thirteen years (until 1915) when, tiring of the inside work, I again cut my fetters.

Am presently interested in the Northland, particularly the new outdoors of northwestern Quebec, which is an absolutely virgin gameland, a wonderful region of hitherto unknown lakes and paddleways, the last virgin Indian country of the North and in parts giving promise of gold and other minerals.

SOME of my happiest moments are when in the North of the shut-mouthed, shoe-paced Indian and trapper, prospector and timber-cruiser. Association with the Ojibway and other woods Indian and the employing of them for years as guides has given them a warm spot in my heart. As a success in their environment they are indeed a type worthy of emulation—a type I admire. So far as their world of canoe and pack, dog-team and snowshoe, tump-line and trap-line is concerned, they stand supreme and no better teachers of means and methods of travel and of woodcraft in the *real* "silent places" can be found. What I have learned in the cruising and exploring of the Northern waterways, of the Height of Land game acres and fishing; concerning the best canoes, best items of clothing and outfit for northern trips, and what I have been taught from many thousands of miles travel with the cream of the woods Indian as my mentor—wherever this knowledge can help you, just ask. I'll do my best to give you the How, When and Where of it; if I'm stuck, I'll try to get the dope from the many sources I know of and, if I can not give you dope I know is *good medicine*, I will frankly admit I'm stumped; there are limitations.

BUT if it is in my prescribed territory and if it has to do with canoe travel, with fishing or big game, game laws, Summer or Winter outing for sport or adventure or the other phases included in this Department's heading, I feel I can help you out. Anyway, I'll do my best. As the Ojibway says, *Quayquay* . . . my council-fire is kindled.—S. E. SANGSTER.

Central America, Edgar Young

THE first thing I know, some one is going to call me a liar! Upon the face of it no one knows better than myself that it appears impossible for one man to have been so many places and worked at so many occupations. Every one has heard the story of the man who had been so many places and remained so long at each one that he was two hundred and eighty-seven years old.

However, if the fact is borne in mind that I was constantly on the jump and that work was only a means to an end—to see and study the southern countries—it comes within the credible. Also, for fear some well-intentioned T.T.T. will think I am a "this-side-of-Panama" adventurer, I will say for his benefit that I saw "the works" from Nogales and C. P. Diaz to Cap de Cuerno.

WITHIN the bounds of Central America, including the Canal Zone, I traveled extensively. The first trip I made was from Nogales, Mexico, to Cedar Creek, Panama, overland. Later I traveled up and down both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts many times as far up as Mexico.

I was inland in all the countries, crossing each of them several times from coast to coast. I hiked many trails, including the "high" trail from Tapachula, Mexico, to Cavallo Blanco, Guatemala, and the beach trail from Limon, C. R., to Puerto Viejo and thence across the mountains into the Sexaola valley and down to Victoria.

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I was employed while down there for short periods as telegraph operator of land wires, cables and wireless. I worked as stenographer. I write the Pitman-Graham system. I was a clerk many times, an interpreter, chief timekeeper, depot-agent, express-messenger, conductor, engineer, train-dispatcher, locomotive-craneman, dinkey-skinner, construction foreman, instructor in English and in Panama as instructor in Spanish, a chauffeur, a cabaret singer, a lineman, a reporter, an aide-de-camp to Lee Christmas, an able-bodied seaman, accountant, auditor of a railroad and steamship lines, worked in a gambling-house and know what a "Harmony Kid roll" is with a pair of ivories.

I TRAVELED for a time with a dentist who was a dope fiend and who put me to working at the trade forthwith. Some of the fillings I put in were works of art, but I never remained to see if they came out. I put in with a renegade doctor, who was a member of the most famous body of medicine in the world, at one time. He and I cleaned up from twenty-five to a hundred dollars a shot injecting a new German discovery.

I made balloon ascensions and parachute leaps in Guatemala City and Salvador. I helped recruit men for a revolution and I smelled powder in an actual battle. I lost several hundred dollars in a scheme to recover money from the safe of a vessel sunk in Corinto, Nicaragua, harbor and still own a straw rancho, a sand plot, two sailboats, a diving-suit and two nets down there. The alcalde thought it was a smuggling scheme and stopped our boats from leaving or arriving after dark.

I HAVE prospected and pocket-hunted, crevice-hunted and picked up "floats." I have lolled around some of the most select clubs in Central America and have been a plain, common, every-day tramp.

Eight years I put in down there. And every minute of the time I was living life at white heat. Sometimes, as I drive my car along the quiet roads of rural Long Island or sit silent on the beach looking across the Great South Bay at the blue line of Fire Island, I wonder why I did these things.

But I ponder only and never regret. For I am glad. I have lived up to the heritage of adventure blood that is within me.

And there are some who scan these lines who know and understand. They are those of the gipsy blood, "who don't fit in," and to such I extend my hand and say "Brother, put it there!"—EDGAR YOUNG.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

***Adventure* has found one man out of five asked for during the past two years.**

CHAPLIN, FREDERICK L.; last heard from in Utica, N. Y., on Dec. 24, 1916. Blue eyes; nice appearing; excellent wardrobe. About 5 ft. 10 in. Interested in moving-picture films, educational films in particular. Release on contract desired, upon payment to him of $140.00, dividend to March 1.—Address L. BAETHER, care L. Bierre, 610 Butternut St., Syracuse, N. Y.

ALLEN, WILLIAM C.; my father. Once owner of Allen's Advertising Agency, 23 Park Row, New York City; also Vanderbilt Bldg., 132 Nassau St. I was born at sea on a trip to Europe. My father remained in America and I have never seen him. Have had no word from him since 1892.—Address F. W. ALLEN, 427 N. Curley St., Baltimore, Md.

BENGTHSSON, ALFRED; generally known as Fred or Al Benson. My husband. Left New York early in August, 1913. Was in Havre, Mont., in early Fall of 1913. Left there to go salmon fishing in Alaska or in Wash. Swede, light hair and eyes, very tanned. Any information appreciated by his wife.—Address MRS. HATTIE A. BENSON, R. R. 1, New Brunswick, N. J.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GREEN, GLENN S.; last heard from somewhere near or about 16 years ago at Etna Mills, Siskiyou Co., Calif. Had a letter from him then stating he and another man had taken an old man on a stretcher to the Co. hospital at Yreka, Siskiyou Co., Calif. Also that the "old fellow" had given him 3 mining claims, but didn't know whether they were of any account as he had not been able to have a look at them. This letter was the last of a cherished correspondence. He was traveling north in search of gold. Might be in Canada or Mont. Would like to hear from him.—Address J. M. V. J. M. DE VEE, Calpella, Mendocino Co., Calif.

LYNCH, P. J. A.; last heard of in Mazatlan, Mex., latter part of 1914. At that time was Bandmaster U. S. Marine Band, Mare Island, Calif. Formerly Principal Musician 16th U. S. Inf. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write his son.—Address WILFRED J. LYNCH, 91a Carl St., San Francisco, Calif.

EGAN, EDWARD and EDWARD KAVANAGH. Both served on U. S. S. *Des Moines* in 1909-10. Last heard from in Brooklyn, N. Y., at Naval Y. M. C. A. Any news of these two ex-gabs will be greatly appreciated.—Address E. M. KAVANAGH, care *Adventure.*

WOULD like to communicate with members of Co. G, 13th U. S. Inf., Ft. Wingate, N. M., from 1880 to 1884. Am in good health.—Address GEORGE CAMPBELL, care J. G. Brown, 418 West 145th St., N. Y. C.

RILEY, A. F.; left Okla., Mo. May 12, 1909. We think he left for Mexico or Arizona. 76 years, 6 ft., weighs 176 lbs. Reward offered for definite information.—Address MRS. PHILIP MCCLAIN, Williamstown, Missouri.

CONNOLLY, CHARLES; last heard of in 'Frisco about to ship on *Maite* to Australia, Sept., 1914. If you see this please answer your old friend.—Address R. L. CARLETON, care *Canadian Fisherman's Mag.*, Montreal, Can.

PRESTON, BUD; formerly Colby Academy tackle and catcher. Fought bare-knuckle draw with "Red" Ames at Tilton, N. H., on Thanksgiving Day, 1908. Old friend wishes to hear from you.—Address J. C. MCDOUGALL, Concord, N. H.

BLOOM, PAUL or "The White Dutchman." Last seen in Baltimore, Md. Was with me in the West Indies 1909-10. Back to States in 1911.—Address WM. W. FADER, 27 The Knickerbocker Apts., Indianapolis, Ind.

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NEUTON, JESSE O.; last heard of in Rutland, Vt. 5 ft. 6 in., 135-40 lbs., red hair. Any information gladly received.—Address C. E. JOSLYN, Randolph, Vt.

FOOTE, ALDEN WILLERT and ARTHUR LONGWORTH FOOTE. Formerly of Boston, Mass. Write.—Address W. L. BUGBEE, P. O. Box 2, North Woodstock, Conn.

WALLACE, OLIVER R.; last heard of in Minnesota. Would like to know his present location.—Address WALTER O. DEERING, Box 64, Beverly, Ohio.

SOLAR, WILLIAM T. (Dutch): ex-member of the 12th U. S. Cav. Also locomotive fireman on S. P. in Sweetwater, Texas, 1914-15. Have a good proposition and want you on it. Communicate with your old Texas pal.—Address CHARLES H. BOYD, Box 375, Stamford, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CRISP, EDWARD; my brother. Last heard of Elbin, Kansas, 1915, where he worked on a farm. 22 years. Light brown hair, 5 ft. 8 in.; stutters. Native of Morgan County, Tenn.—Address BUNYAN CRISP, 2128 E. 79th St., Cleveland, O.

PARKER; first name unknown. Formerly boatswain's mate U. S. Navy. From Erie, Pa. I met him at Webb Farm near Oaks, N. D., where he left for Minneapolis in Sept., 1914.—Address JAMES CUDDIHY, 736 Cass Ave., Detroit, Mich.

BOTTS, MRS.; my mother. Have not seen her for 13 years. My mother and father separated in 1904. My father took me and my mother took my sisters with her.—Address ORVAL BOTTS, Cusson, Minn.

The following have been inquired for in full in either the May or June issues of *Adventure*. You can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ANDERSON, "MOONEY" and "RAVENHAM;" Avery Gus; Baird, from Glasgow, Scotland; Callen, Philo.; Clymer, Chas. A.; Colloins, Jim and Michael, Cook, Luther, Crammer, John; Cummings, Harold R.; Curran, Joe: Dishon, Birt or (Shorty); Estelle, Ed. J.; Gearhart, Ray: Griffin, Birtry; Hamilton, Mildred Frances: Hammond, Edward: Harbin, Hayden; Harris, George: Harris, James T.: Himman, W. W.; Hoffman, August F., "E," 2nd F. A.; Hoffman, A. F., left home to go North ten years ago; Jennings, Andrew "Buzz.;" Jewell, John H., relations; Lebcher, Dr. Chester; McDaniel, George; McGregor, Stuart; McLanahan, Mrs. Caroline; Maiden, Wilson F.; Martin, Chas. F.; Mauk, Stanley M.; Miller, "Virgy;" Montross, Samuel; Moore, Mrs. Mae or Mae Allison; Mullen, David W., "B" 8th Cav., Camp Stotenburg, Pampanga, P. I.; Peterson, Earl Leslie; Pollock, G. A.; Pool, Myrtle; Roberts, Charles A.; Rowan, A. S; Seeley, Edward; Smith.—rubber worker; Stebbins, Charles, medical student from Wisc.; Stettler, Lloyd; Swain, Fred; Tobisen, Charles J.; Walbert, Morris; White, Carl; Whitmer, William and Orlando (father and brother); Wilson, Lewis E.; "F," 2nd F. A.; Yeager, Neva M. and her daughter Helen.

MISCELLANEOUS: Survivors of Co. H, 6th Regiment of Infantry, California Volunteers, War of the Rebellion; English, where are you now?

MRS. MAUDE THOMAS, Hastlar Gal Breath, Jan Spander, Bertha Wilkins Starkweather.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C 293, W. 311, W 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

When you pick up your August issue of ADVENTURE on July 3d you will find:

"The Northwoman" **A Complete Novel**
By Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Two big problems are solved far up in the timber lands of the North. The city and the wilds clash. The bigness—mentally, spiritually and physically, of the Northwoman wins where other means fail. Complete in this issue.

Rotorua Rex ***By J. Allan Dunn***

You've just finished reading the first instalment about this picturesque South Seas island king who revises Hoyle's rules on poker; of the young American with a taste for adventure; of the cool-headed English girl. More thrills to come next month.

Contraband Matrimony
By Arthur D. Howden Smith

Your old friend *Captain McConaughy* sails on a new ship, with guns—and a most unusual gun-commander. Things happen fast.

Bearly Reasonable ***By W. C. Tuttle***

Magpie Simpkins goes in for sclentific research. A laugh from start to finish.

Dan of the Sword ***By Charles M. Cosby***

The Philippines. About Moros who wanted to fight, and an American colonel who didn't. Then "*Yankee Dan*" comes into command. *He* has no prejudice against fighting.

The Hunch ***By Roy P. Churchill***

A yarn of the navy. Two sailors investigate a floating wreck. On board they find something you won't soon forget.

The Taming of "Bad Jack" Creedy
By James B. Hendryx

The tale of a gold rush into the Yukon; the Northwest Mounted and a "bad" man. Perhaps he wasn't such a bad man after all.

With His Record Clear ***By Russell A. Boggs***

A railroad story. An incompetent division superintendent fires a station agent. He lives to regret it.

Old Wade Speaks a Parable
By M. F. Brooks

"*Sob*" *Howland* honk-honks into a mining town, arrayed in a ruffled linen shirt front and white flannel trousers. "*Measles*" takes exception to the attire—and then wishes he hadn't. Old Wade tells where and when "*Sob*" has worn rougher clothes.

Thanks to the Devil ***By Frederick Simpich***

They take the devil seriously in China. Just how seriously, only *Mike Flaherty* knows. And he turns this knowledge to account when his railroad career and that of several others is about to come to a sudden end.

AUGUST ADVENTURE

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First Aero Squadron, U. S. Army—Photographed at Columbus, N. M. Look for the famous muslin Sack.

The Army Aviator (at right) and his mechanician are enjoying the "Makings" between flights.

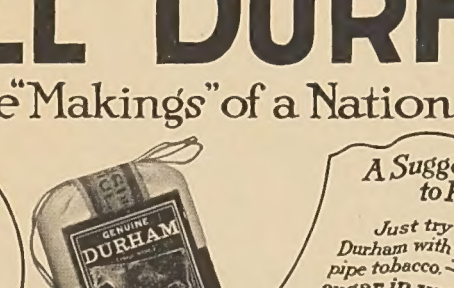
All Branches of the Service "Roll Their Own"

Good old "Bull" Durham tobacco has been the smoke of Uncle Sam's Army and Navy for three generations. It is part of the equipment of every soldier boy and jack tar. Millions of other independent Americans always carry the "Makings" with them—ready at all times to *"roll their own"* and *"hold their own."*

You can make for yourself, with your own hands, the mildest, most fragrant, most enjoyable cigarette in the world—and the most economical. Machines can't imitate it. The only way to get that freshness, that flavor, that lasting satisfaction—is to **"roll your own"** with good old "Bull" Durham.

"BULL" DURHAM

The "Makings" of a Nation



A Suggestion to Pipe Smokers

Just try mixing "Bull" Durham with your favorite pipe tobacco.— It's like sugar in your coffee

Guaranteed by The American Tobacco Co.

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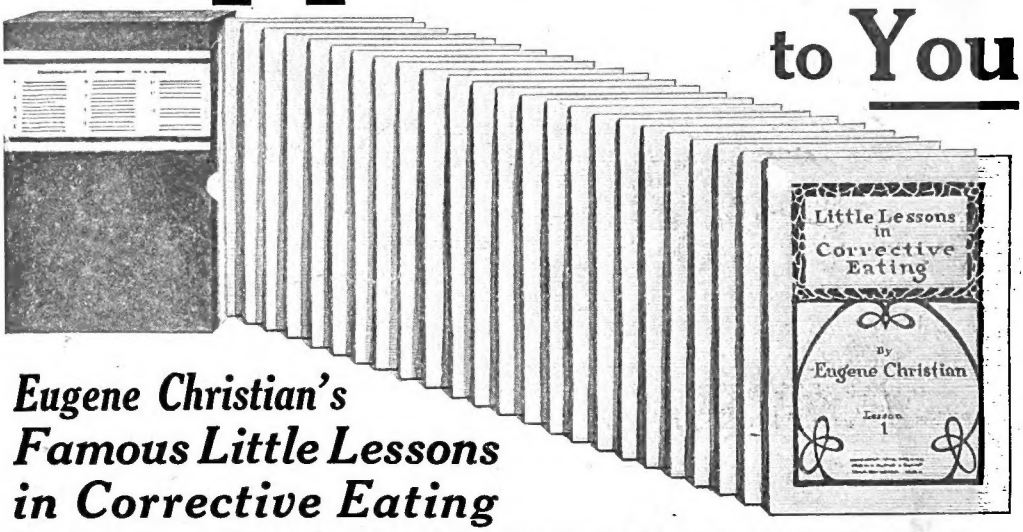

Eugene Christian's Famous Little Lessons in Corrective Eating

Here is the opportunity you have waited for. Don't miss this extraordinary offer. You have read and heard about these remarkable little books, and how thousands of chronic invalids have found through them the way to perfect health and greater efficiency—and you have wished you could read them. Now the chance to do so is yours on this startling offer, if you act quickly.

Your Crimes Against Your Stomach

Special Offer

Mail the coupon below without any money. We will send you the entire set of these amazing books—24 lessons by mail prepared for free examination.

Either you must stop eating poisonous food combinations that explode in your stomach or you must be prepared to pay the penalty in chronic ill-health, inefficiency and suffering.

It has been the almost invariable experience of the thousands who have followed the simple advice on eating contained in these wonderful lessons that they enjoy a new type of health—a health so perfect that it can only be described as super health, a sense of mental power and physical energy that keeps you "champing at the bit."

Twenty years ago the author himself was at death's door. By following the rules explained in these lessons, Eugene Christian cheated death and literally ate his way back to health. To-day, at fifty-five, he has more vitality, more stamina, more endurance and vigor than most youths.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY:

"I am feeling fine again, thanks to you and your course of lessons on Scientific Eating. There ought to be 100,000 men practising Scientific Eating in America."—F. A. Fulby, Niagara Falls, South Ont., Canada.

"I am delighted beyond expression with the lessons. They have proved invaluable to me and have revolutionized both my diet and my health."—Olive M. Sees, 725 East Tipton St., Huntington, Ind.

"I have read of you for years and I have recently looked over some of your work. You are doing much for humanity. I congratulate you on your latest contribution to the health and happiness of man."—Dr. V. M. George, 2305 N. High St., Columbus, Ohio.

Mail this Coupon. No obligations of any kind. Make your own decision as to what Corrective Eating will do for you. Remember, 98 per cent. of all sickness is entirely due to the wrong eating habits. Very often good foods create a chemical reaction in the digestive organs and are changed into toxic poisons that cause acidity, gastritis, constipation and blood-poisoning. The results are headaches, dizziness, anemia, melancholia, stomach and kidney troubles, and a long chain of attendant ills.

Corrective Eating Society, Inc. Dept. 1227, 450 Fourth Ave., New York.

Without any obligations on my part you may send to me by parcel post, prepaid, for free examination, Eugene Christian's Twenty-four Little Lessons in Corrective Eating. I will either return the books in five days or will send you $3.00 in full payment as per your Special Advertised Offer.

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Address.....

Pay No Money

—Do not delay. You may never again have such an opportunity to learn for yourself, at no expense, the wonders of Corrective Eating as an aid in fighting disease and restoring health. Do not wait, but fill out and mail the coupon now. The entire set of Little Lessons will be sent at once. Examine them for five days. Then if you are not convinced, if you are not perfectly satisfied, return them and no questions will be asked. Or send us only $3.00 in full payment and keep the books if you wish. But don't wait. Write to-day. Corrective Eating Society, Inc., Dept. 1227, 450 Fourth Ave., New York, N.Y.

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